

TODAY'S READING: EPHESIANS 1-6

OVERVIEW:

The believer's position in Christ (chapter 1); the believer's salvation by grace through faith (chapter 2); the revelation of the mystery of the church (chapter 3); the believer's walk in the world (chapters 4-6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

There are a zillion things that could be said about the Book of Ephesians and should be said, but there is simply not space to do so in this setting: We will only be able to establish the "big picture" at best. Perhaps the best way to see the big picture of this Book, is by applying it to one of the most controversial passages, not only in this Book, but the entire Bible. That passage is found in chapter one, verses 4 and 5: *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."*

Now, based on where you land on the interpretation of these verses (and verses such as these), you are labeled a "Calvinist" or an "Arminian." Several hundred years ago, one position was popularized by John Calvin, and the other by Jacob Arminius. The basic Arminian position when it is used today, is that in terms of salvation, *"whosoever will may come"* (Rev. 22:17). The basic Calvinist position as it is expressed today, is that only the quote – unquote "elect," will be saved; meaning that in eternity past, God chose, according to His sovereign grace, those who will be saved" – and in the final analysis, those are the only ones who will be saved! (Most who hold to this position would rather say they believe in the doctrine of "Sovereign Grace" or "Sovereign Election," than to say they believe in Calvinism. Okay, we'll go with it.)

There are many others, who if they were asked if they were an Arminian or a Calvinist, would answer "yes," meaning that they believe both. Their reasoning is, that there is no doubt about it, the Bible teaches that *"whosoever will may come"*, and yet, that there is no doubt about the fact that the Bible also teaches that believers are *"chosen in him before the foundation of the world."* When asked how they reconcile the two seemingly contradictory statements, they may answer, as did Spurgeon, "Friends don't need to be reconciled!" They believe God put both in the Bible, so they both must be equally true, and though they

don't come together in the human mind, they do come together in the mind of God, so rather than force them to come together, let God be God, because after all, His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are far above our thoughts, and the secret things belong to the Lord, so just accept it, and go on! This reasoning is usually followed with the illustration that goes something like, as we approach the gates of heaven there's a sign over the top that says, "*whosoever will my come.*" As you walk through the gates on into heaven, and you look back above them, however, the sign says, "*Chosen before the foundation of the world.*" That "middle-of-the-road" approach is rather convincing, and sounds pretty spiritual, and even humble, but none of those things are the real issue! The issue is always the same: Is it BIBLICAL?

So we come to verse 4 of Ephesians 1, and what does it say? "*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.*" Someone says, I mean, how clear can it be? My goodness, just let the Bible be the Bible! Okay! Let's!

First of all, if this verse is teaching that sometime before the foundation of the world, God had already chosen each of us who know Him, the verse is actually teaching that we were "in Christ" before the foundation of the world. Now that poses a huge problem! Because the Bible clearly states that prior to our salvation, we were:

"IN ADAM"! (1 Cor. 15:22)

"IN TRESPASSES AND SINS"! (Eph. 2:1)

"IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH"! (Eph. 2:3)

"IN THE WORLD"! (Eph. 2:12)

Are we to believe that in eternity past ("before the foundation of the world"), God chose us "in Christ," and then somehow we came out of Christ, and were found "IN ADAM, IN TRESPASSES AND SINS, IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH, and IN THE WORLD," so the He could put us back "IN CHRIST" again? That just doesn't make any sense, y'all!

The fact is folks, Ephesians 1:4-5 must be understood within the very first principle of Bible study: CONTEXT!

Most people come to these verses and read "*He hath chosen US in him,*" and assume that the "US" means "individuals chosen to salvation." Hopefully, you have learned what happens to people who ASSUME!

In the context of the Book of Ephesians, that “US” is “the Church” in a collective sense, “the Body of Christ”! That’s what the whole Book of Ephesians is about and why it is placed in the Bible! To teach us that the Church is the Body of Christ!

Notice verse 10 of chapter one: *“That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things IN CHRIST.”* And to what time period is that referring? The church age, right?

Yes, Ephesians 1:4 teaches that God made a very definite decision before the foundation of the world. But what was He actually “CHOOSING”? Individuals to salvation? Absolutely not! Before the foundation of the world, God chose that the church, the Body of Christ (all of “US” who exercised our will and by faith, called upon Him to save us) would be different than any people who ever lived. God chose that our salvation would place us “IN CHRIST.”

Do you realize that the only people who have ever been “IN CHRIST,” are the people saved in the church age?

Do you realize that as smooth as Noah, Daniel and Job were (Ez. 14:20), they were never “IN CHRIST” a day in their lives?! That was something God decreed before the foundation of the world that would be totally unique to believers in the church age!

Read carefully in Ephesians 3:1-12, and you will see that *“the eternal purpose which he purposed IN CHRIST Jesus our Lord”* (3:11), was that it would be the “CHURCH” that would know *“the manifold wisdom of God,”* having been placed “IN CHRIST.”

Those of “US” who are believers in the church age are the only ones who have had the distinct privilege of being *“holy and without blame before him in love”* (1:4)! Is that because we’re so much more holy and blameless and loveable than Old Testament saints? No! It’s because we have been placed “IN HIM”! Do you realize that the only ones who have been *“predestinated unto the adoption of children”* (1:5), are those of “US” who are believers in the church age?

And do you see now why it is that believers in the church age are eternally secure, and why that was not true for Old Testament saints, and will not be true for Tribulation saints (Matt. 24:13)? It is because

we are the only ones who are placed “IN HIM,” and our righteousness and acceptance with God is not based on what we do, but in Who Christ is (II Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:6)!

This is really very simple when you simply place the verses in their context, and stop reading into them things that aren't there!

Monday – December 11th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: PHILIPPIANS 1-4

OVERVIEW: Christ our LIFE (chapter 1); Christ our PATTERN (chapter 2); Christ our RIGHTEOUSNESS (chapter 3); Christ our SUFFICIENCY (chapter 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we get started in the Book of Philippians, let's take a few minutes to talk about the THEME of the Book. What is this Book really about? What was God's purpose in putting the Book of Philippians into the canon of scripture? And how are we to determine that?

One of the best pieces of advice I've ever received in terms of Bible study is, "Learn to emphasize what God emphasizes." You see, God doesn't have a volume control on His voice (i.e. Word), and He didn't use a highlighter to accentuate His major themes when He was inspiring the men who actually wrote it down. What He uses to make His point is repetition. That's how God emphasizes His point. It is amazing the things that can be gleaned by simply observing the repeated words, phrases, ideas and concepts in a Book of the Bible. For example:

In the Book of Philippians, the word "rejoice" (or some form of the word – rejoice, rejoiced, rejoicing), is found 12 times, and the word "joy" is found six times. This is an incredibly positive Book! It is obvious that Paul had an extremely positive attitude when he wrote this letter. In fact, so positive that you might get the idea that he's in about the third month of a six month sabbatical, and he's just chillin' out in some incredible five-star oceanfront condo in some resort city along the Mediterranean coastline – the sun is shining, and he's sipping Frappucinos and eating pistachio nuts out of a hammock, and life is just good!

But there's another word that keeps popping up in this Book that lets you know that that isn't the case, it's the word "bonds." Paul keeps talking about "my bonds." In fact, he talks about them four times in chapter one alone! And what he's referring to is the fact that far from being in some resort Mediterranean city on the beach, he's actually in prison, in "bonds," or in other words, chained to a Roman guard! And what's interesting about this "sunny disposition" that shines all the way through this Book, is that he was not in prison for doing something wrong, so that Paul could just come to grips with the fact that his being there was the due consequence of what he had done and he would just have to make the best of it. No, the fact is, he hadn't done anything wrong, and was actually there because of a false charge!

And it wasn't that he was able to keep his positive attitude because he had only been there a couple of days, and so he was still able to keep himself psyched up, because after all, this would be a cool story for his monthly missionary letter and all. No, check this out. By the time of the writing of this letter he had been in prison for five years!

And it wasn't that Paul was over-the-hill, and had already passed his window of effectiveness anyway. No! When he was cast into prison his ministry was at its absolute pinnacle! These five years he had been in prison should have been the best, most productive years of his entire ministry! And yet rather, day after day he's in bonds, chained to a Roman guard. And it wasn't that he was in prison because that dirty, nasty devil had caused lost people to lie about Paul, and orchestrate some devious plot to have him cast into prison. Do you know why he's there? He's there because of gossip that began and spread amongst Christians! (You can read all about it in Acts 21.) He is in prison because of a rumor that was being spread by believing Jews, who were still hanging on to and were zealous for the law.

That's why he's there! And I'm going through all of these things so you will understand that there was absolutely no human explanation for Paul to have the attitude of rejoicing that he has as he's writing this letter! He has every right humanly to be bitter, angry, disillusioned, frustrated, depressed and worried. And that's important to note, because chances are real good, that in some way, shape, or form, every one of us feels, at least to some degree, that we're in a prison. Not a prison with bars, as in Paul's case, but a "prison" nonetheless. Perhaps there are things that have taken place in your life that have left you feeling that you are "locked in." They've "hindered" you, or "restricted" you in some way. They've "tied" your hands, so to speak. The bars are invisible; the chains can't be seen with physical eyes, but they're just as real as the ones that were restricting Paul!

Perhaps you're in a job you absolutely hate, but you see no other options, and it's a ball and chain to you every weekday of your life. Or maybe you don't have a job at all, and feel that you're in a prison of a dull, unfulfilled life. Or maybe yours is a prison of loneliness. You feel imprisoned because you're single; or maybe you feel imprisoned because you're married! Or maybe like Paul, you have been the victim of gossip, and the hurt you have inside of you has left you feeling that your freedom has been taken away, and it's bound you up by your own emotions. Or perhaps you've been the victim of some injustice, and your mind keeps you behind bars because you can't stop thinking about it.

I don't know what kind of prison you may be in with its invisible bars, but both the human writer and the divine Author of the Book of Philippians want to let you know that it is possible to be in a prison, and find freedom, and joy in life and ministry, regardless of your circumstances, and no matter who was responsible for making them that way – and even if they never change!

And the key to living in that kind of victory is the other key point of emphasis God makes in this Book: our attitude! The word “mind” is found 10 times in this little Book. The word “think” is found five times, and the word “remember” is found once. In all, 16 times God is trying to get us to see that joy is a choice we make because of right thinking. And that's the theme of this Book.

Some of you have faced circumstances in your life liked we mentioned above that have left you discouraged, depressed and/or imprisoned. In chapter one he tells us, we can find joy in our CIRCUMSTANCES because Christ is our LIFE. And the key verse in the chapter is verse 21 where Paul says, *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

Some of you have had people who have injured you in some way, and you wrestle with bitterness and anger. In chapter two he says, we can find joy in our RELATIONSHIPS because Christ is our PATTERN. And the key verse in chapter two is in verse 5 which says, *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

Some of you wrestle with your flesh – worldliness on one hand, and good deeds on the other, but both driven by the same carnal source: the flesh! And in chapter three Paul says, we can find joy in our WALK because Christ is our RIGHTEOUSNESS. And the key verse in this chapter is verse 9 where Paul says, *“[That I may (v.8)] be found in him, not having mine OWN righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”*

And bless your hearts, some of you are gripped by worry and fear. In chapter four Paul says, we can find joy in our ADVERSITIES because Christ is our SUFFICIENCY. And the key verse in chapter four is verse 13 where Paul says, *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”*

As you can see, the Book of Philippians is an extremely practical Book that addresses real-life issues, and points us toward the joy that is found in and through Christ alone.

Tuesday – December 12th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: COLOSSIANS 1-4

OVERVIEW: The preeminence of Christ (chapter 1); four warnings (chapter 2); putting off and putting on (chapter 3); real relationships (chapter 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Our Lord dictated a letter to the Apostle John addressed to the church of the Laodiceans in approximately 96 A.D. giving them one of the most stern condemnations found in the Word of God. The rebuke is found in Revelation 3:14-22. This church actually made the Lord Jesus Christ want to throw up (Rev. 3:16). Within our Lord's sharp words we find the phrase "*and knowest not.*" Not only did the church at Laodicea fail to measure up to God's standard, they weren't even aware they had any problems, and actually felt like they were exactly what they needed to be. You have to wonder how many churches in America today feel that they are doing just fine, when in reality, they, like the Laodiceans, are "*wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked*"? How many individuals have deceived themselves into believing that they are living the "Christian life", when in reality they need to cleanse themselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Cor. 7:1).

More than 30 years earlier God had sent a letter to this church in Laodicea. In 62 A.D., the Apostle Paul wrote four letters from a Roman prison (Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, Colossians). The letter to the Colossians was to be carried by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9). Within this letter we find the key to preventing Laodicean Christianity. The church in Colossae was instructed to have their letter read to the church in Laodicea. It is obvious that though the church at Laodicea may have read the letter, they certainly did not heed the warnings contained in it. Within 35 years the Laodiceans would come to represent an arrogant church that had literally locked Jesus outside (Rev. 3:20).

Every church is one generation from becoming lukewarm. However, those who heed Paul's instruction to the Colossians will find Christ preeminent within their congregation (1:18), rather than knocking on the door from the outside (Rev. 3:20).

In chapter 1, Paul begins his letter by commending the Colossians on their faith and love (1:4). We live in a day when many churches are known for buildings and programs. However, it should be faith and love that defines our reputation. Upon hearing of this love, Paul prays. In verses 9-12, he gives a prayer that any believer could pray for another believer. He prays for their:

- Mind (that they would have knowledge, wisdom, and understanding).
- Feet (that they would walk worthy of the Lord).
- Muscles (that they would be strengthened spiritually).
- Hearts (that they would be thankful).

This is a prayer that every parent should pray for their children. It is a prayer that we can pray for each other within the body of Christ.

Paul then turns his attention to Christ. Colossians 1:13-29 contains the theme and foundation of the letter. It is Christ alone Who should come first (have preeminence) in everything (1:18). The church of Laodicea focuses on themselves (or their rights). It is only when we focus on Christ and understand Who He is that we find our purpose in life. Paul ends the chapter by revealing an awesome mystery to the Colossians. This preeminent Christ now dwells in them (1:27)! The physical temple of Christ's body had been destroyed. However, through His death God has raised up temples all over this earth. Each temple containing the resurrected Christ and demonstrating God's glory to the world.

Chapter 2 contains four warnings to the Colossians (2:4, 8,16,18). It will be the world's philosophy (love of knowledge) and legalism (a system that finds God's favor in human merit) that will cause a church to stop focusing on Christ. Paul tells these believers that they are complete in Christ alone (2:10) and instructs them to walk in faith (2:6-7).

The failure of Laodicean Christianity isn't that we DENY Christ, but that we DE-EMPHASIZE Him! The enemy wants us to believe that Christ is insufficient, and we are in need of philosophy, religion, psychology, etc. In Chapter 2 Paul is warning believers not to fall prey to this deception.

Paul deals with how to practically walk in faith in chapter 3. The believer is commanded to set his affection on things above, and to then put off the old man with his deeds (3:1-10). He is then commanded to renew his mind (3:10), and put on the new man, which is Christ (3:15). This is the process by which a believer is to continually live. After talking about our relationship with the Lord in 3:1-17, our relationship with those within our family in 3:18-21, our relationship with those with whom we work in 3:22-4:1, in 4:2-6 he talks about our relationship with the lost world, and then in 4:7-18 he talks about our relationship with those within the body of Christ. If you run that through your mind, you'll find that that covers every relationship we have in life! The whole point is, now that we've been risen with Christ (i.e. have been saved), the Lord Jesus Christ is to have preeminence in every relationship in our lives. Does He in yours?

Wednesday – December 13th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: I THESSALONIANS 1– II THESSALONIANS 3

OVERVIEW: A model church (I Thess. 1); a model of discipleship (I Thess. 2); a model of faith (I Thess. 3); a model walk (I Thess. 4-5); comfort in tribulation (II Thess. 1); clarification in teaching (II Thess. 2); content on various topics (II Thess. 3).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In Revelation 2 and 3, our Lord dictated to the Apostle John seven letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. They were seven churches that actually existed historically at the time of the writing of the Revelation, and addressed actual situations that these churches were facing at that time. But students of the Bible have noted for centuries that beyond just the historical aspect of these letters, there is also a prophetic aspect. When placed into the context of the whole of the Book of Revelation, the seven letters also provide for us a panoramic view of the seven stages of church history that basically picks up where the Book of Acts leaves off in the history of the early church, and takes you all the way up to the Rapture of the church, which coincidentally enough is found in the Book of Revelation immediately following the conclusion of the seventh and final letter to the churches (see Rev. 4:1). But there is another amazing coincidence that should be noted. Not only did our Lord write letters to the seven churches, but the Apostle Paul also wrote letters to seven churches, or groups of churches (to the church of the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and the Thessalonians). And what's even more coincidental is that if you were to take the letters to the seven churches to whom our Lord wrote, and lay them next to the letters to the seven churches to whom Paul wrote, you would find an amazing similarity of context. Certainly the most obvious connection would be our Lord's letter to the Laodiceans, and Paul's letter to the Colossians. In fact, the only time other than Revelation 3:14-22 that the word Laodicea is found in the Bible is the Book of Colossians, where it just happens to be found five times! The thing to take away from that observation is that though the Book of Colossians was written to address specific situations taking place in that church when the Spirit of God inspired Paul to write it, and has certainly had application for every local church in every period of church history, there is also a very specific application of that letter to the church of Jesus Christ in the Laodicean Church Period (approximately 1901 to the Rapture).

All of that is important to recognize because there is at least one other

unbelievable coincidence and connection that needs to be observed. Immediately following the Book of Colossians (again, the letter with specific application to the church in the Laodicean Age), comes the letters to the Thessalonians. And do you know what these two letters address specifically? The Rapture and the Second Coming! And again, in the Book of Revelation, as soon as you close chapter 3 with the letter to the Laodiceans, you begin chapter four, and immediately, heaven opens, there is a sound of a trumpet, a voice saying “*Come up hither,*” and John (who, as we saw several weeks ago, is the disciple who pictures what God intends for a believer in Christ to be) is caught up into heaven to see the raptured church in heaven (Rev. 4 and 5), and to witness four accounts of the Second Coming (Rev. 6-19).

What that shows us is that the Books of I and II Thessalonians are the letters written to teach the church about HOW TO BE PREPARED FOR THE LAST DAYS. In fact, notice that each of the five chapters of I Thessalonians ends talking about the coming of the Lord (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-17; 5:23).

But what becomes very clear as you read through the content of these letters is that though they deal with the PROPHETIC concerning the last days, Paul wants to be sure that we don't approach the Rapture and Second coming as doctrines we sit around and contemplate, talk about, or read novels about, but as doctrines to be LIVED! He wants to be sure that we got these events out of the PROPHETIC and into the PRACTICAL! These Books are really a “How To” manual about how to prepare for the last days: what things we need to emphasize in these last days; how we are to go about the Lord's work in these last days so that we can be as effective as possible.

It is also worth noting that whereas each chapter of I Thessalonians ends with a reference concerning the Lord's coming, each chapter of II Thessalonians ends with a reference concerning grace (1:12; 2:16; 3:18). Obviously, as we labor in these dark last days prior to our Lord's coming, we will need to be sure that we apply and rely upon the grace of God that He promised would be “*sufficient*” through “*infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, [and] in distresses*” (II Cor. 12:9-10).

Two other things worth noting from the biblical context of these Books and God's points of emphasis through-out, have to do with:

1) The Philosophy of Leadership. It is interesting that the letters written to teach the church about effective ministry in the last days as we prepare for the Lord's coming just happen to be the only letters in the New Testament written as a team effort. I and II Thessalonians are the only letters written by three authors: Paul,

Silvanus (Silas) and Timotheous (Timothy). In Paul's other letters, he mentions those who are with him in his greeting, but he immediately kicks in to the first person singular, "I." And as you read through I and II Thessalonians, there's no getting around the fact that it is the writing style of Paul. They definitely reflect his personality and vocabulary, but what is interesting is that he consistently writes in the first person plural. He talks in terms of "we" and "us." There are a few places where his apostolic authority surfaces and he uses the word "I," but by in large, all throughout I and II Thessalonians, he models for us what is to be our PHILOSOPHY of LEADERSHIP in the last days, and that is, it must be a TEAM EFFORT! Paul, Silas and Timothy were a unit. They were committed to teamwork. What we need to learn from their example is that if we're going to be effective in carrying out the job the Lord has for us in the last days through our local churches, we must work together as a team, and that must flow out of the leadership. Much more needs to be said about that, but space will not permit.

2) The Priority of Lordship. I and II Thessalonians begin very similarly: "*Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheous, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the LORD JESUS CHRIST*" (I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:1). Now, certainly the phrase "*the LORD JESUS CHRIST*" is not an unfamiliar phrase, or a phrase that is unique to I and II Thessalonians. In fact, the phrase is used 81 times in the New Testament. What is unique, however, is that 20 out of the 81 times that this title is used in reference to Jesus, it is in the Books of I and II Thessalonians. 20 times! By far, more than any other Book of the New Testament, or pair of Books in the New Testament. Almost 25% of the time the phrase is found, it is found in these eight chapters! Now, from the historical context, Acts 17:7 makes clear why Paul so emphasizes this phrase. Jesus being the "Lord," or "King" was the issue that got the city so stirred up in the first place! But in the biblical context, remembering that these are the Books that tell us about how to be prepared for the last days, I think God is trying to let us know that it is more important than ever that people understand Who Jesus Christ is, and the position He wants to have in His church as LORD! Revelation 3:14-22 lets us know that His Lordship in the church in the last days is so far from a reality that He is actually standing at the door knocking, wanting to be invited to come in to take His place of preeminence.

Does your life reflect Christ's LORDSHIP, and are you a part of the ministry TEAM of your local church?

Thursday – December 14th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: I TIMOTHY 1-6

OVERVIEW: The proper use of the Law of God (chapter 1); the power of prayer and the place of women in the local church (chapter 2); the qualifications for church leaders (chapter 3); the contrast between false and faithful teachers (chapter 4); the responsibilities of the members of a local church (chapter 5); sound advice from God to servants, false teachers, the rich, and the educated (chapter 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The Book of I Timothy is the first of three New Testament Books referred to as “Pastoral Epistles” (the others being II Timothy and Titus). These Books are obviously called “Pastoral Epistles” because they are addressed to pastors of local churches, and have to do with conducting the affairs as undershepherds in Christ’s church. The instruction in these letters is very specific, and most certainly deals with situations pastors will encounter in carrying out their biblical office, but don’t let that cause you to think that these letters do not have incredibly practical ramifications for your life and ministry! These letters actually present the relationship God intends to exist between a disciple and discipler! Sure, Timothy had been given the responsibility of holding the office of pastor in the church at Ephesus, but he was also an individual member of the body of Christ. He is a real person, with real weaknesses, and real problems, and struggles just like all of us. God placed these Books in His Bible not just for pastors, but to provide every believer practical instruction concerning being a follower (disciple) of Christ on both sides of discipleship.

As we move into I Timothy today, keep in mind that Timothy was the son of a father who was a Greek and a mother who was a Jew (Acts 16:1-3). His mother’s name was Eunice and his grandmother’s name was Lois (II Tim. 1:5). He resided in Lystra (Acts 16:1-2; 20:4), where he was raised in the knowledge of the scriptures (II Tim. 3:15).

Upon visiting Timothy’s hometown of Lystra on his second missionary journey, Paul was impressed with Timothy’s testimony in his local church, and felt impressed to invite him to join him and Silas as a part of their missionary team. Keep in mind that this invitation was extended to Timothy immediately following Paul’s conflict with Barnabas concerning the fact that Paul didn’t want John Mark to be included on his missionary team because he was too young, too scared, and because he needed to be discipled (Acts 15:36-41). Because God is

sovereign, and because He obviously has a sense of humor, He turns right around and gives Paul a fearful young man who needs to be disciplined to be a part of his missionary team! Just file into your head, that when we refuse to learn the lessons from the situations God has put into place, He will simply recreate similar circumstances until we learn them!

To catch the real heart of this letter, recognize that Paul most likely led Timothy to the Lord (I Tim. 1:2, 18; II Tim. 1:2, 2:1; I Cor. 4:17) when he and Barnabas came to Lystra on their first missionary journey (Acts 14:5-7). Timothy was Paul's trusted companion, and he used him for some of the toughest assignments in the different churches (I Thess. 3:1-7; I Cor. 4:16-17). Paul goes on in scripture to describe Timothy as one with whom he was completely likeminded, and viewed serving with him as a father with his son (Phil. 2:19-22). Timothy struggled with the problem of fear (I Cor. 16:10; II Tim. 1:7), which probably led to his stomach problems, and other physical infirmities that Paul mentioned in chapter 5 and verse 23.

Paul wrote this letter because he felt the need to give young Timothy some encouragement to stay in the battle as a good soldier, warring a good warfare (1:18) in the midst of false teachers and backsliding believers in the church at Ephesus (1:3-4, 19-20). Paul had invested three solid years in this church at Ephesus (Acts 20:31), and had an intense love for them (Acts 20:37-38). Paul writes to Timothy to encourage him to stay at Ephesus, and fulfill his role, and responsibility as the church's pastor, in spite of the difficulties he faced. Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would both enter and arise out of the church, and now that it had happened, Paul felt confident that Timothy was the man for the job of shutting the mouths of the false teachers (1:3; 4:7; 6:17), and protecting the young flock of God in that church!

This letter was written from Laodicea (see AV 1611 postscript) and sent to Timothy in Ephesus between Paul's two imprisonments in Rome. It is interesting to note that Paul desired Timothy to stay in Ephesus (a place that was "fully-purposed" to do God's work – Rev. 2:1-2) rather than join him in Laodicea (where the Christians felt they had "rights" – Rev. 3:14-18). Paul knew where God's work could most effectively be accomplished. We would do well in this age if we would just "stay in Ephesus," as opposed to "living and loving Laodicea".

Additional highlights from Paul's first letter to young Timothy:

Four things Jesus Christ is to those who know Him: Our SAVIOUR, Our HOPE, Our FATHER, and Our LORD. (1:1-2)

The lawful use of God's law is two-fold (1:8-10): 1) To reveal what sin is (Rom. 5:20, 7:7), and 2) to bring us to Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:21-24).

Paul's life of longsuffering is the pattern for our lives (1:16. See also II Cor. 11:23-28)

Standing for truth will sometimes require naming of names of those who are disobedient and that teach false doctrine. (1:18-20)

As believers, prayer is the "first" thing we should do to maintain a close relationship with God. (2:1)

No mediator ("middle man") other than CHRIST can bring us and/or our prayers to the Father. Not Mary. Not the saints. Not a priest. ONLY Christ! (2:5)

God was manifest (i.e. shown to us; revealed) in the flesh and it is WITHOUT CONTROVERSY (3:16; I Cor. 15:1-8; Acts 1:3). Bank on it!

Refuse to be intimidated by those who say you're too young to be doing God's work. Preach and teach God's truth with authority! (4:11-12a)

The desire for more will end up fooling and hurting you. (6:5-9)

Avoid oppositions of "science" falsely so called (6:20 – Note: Evolution is a religion, not a science - see below):

- * Christians believe – "In the beginning GOD..."

- * Evolutionists believe – "In the beginning DIRT..."

Friday – December 15th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: II TIMOTHY 1-4

OVERVIEW:

Important reminders regarding faith, fear, and holding fast sound words in the last days (chapter 1); responsibilities of believers in the last days (chapter 2); the realities of living in the apostasy of the last days (chapter 3); the Apostle Paul's final charge to preach the Word in the last days (chapter 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

This letter to Timothy records the last words of Paul that were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. It was written from a prison in Rome (Mamertine Prison) where Paul was being held as he awaited execution for preaching Christ during Nero's reign, the cruel Roman Emperor who hated Christians and Christianity! Paul obviously had been arrested again since writing his first epistle to Timothy in 65 A.D. The Bible gives little detail as to Paul's ministry between his two imprisonments, but we can conclude from scripture that he went to Nicopolis (Titus 3:12 - written in 65 A.D.) and then to Troas (4:13), where he had left his cloak, some books, and the parchments (i.e. the scripture) because of an apparent need for a quick exit. At the time of the writing of this final letter to Timothy, Paul is lonely, but he is not in despair (II Cor. 4:8-10, II Tim. 4:17). This is in spite of the fact that every one of his trusted companions had left him (except Luke - II Tim. 4:11), just as they did the Lord (except John, the beloved disciple) as the time of his execution drew near. Paul, longing to see his beloved son in the faith one last time, writes to Timothy asking him to come to Rome as soon as he possibly could (4:9, 21). Amazingly, the thrust of this letter deals with Paul encouraging Timothy not to be afraid of taking his place in the ministry of the gospel and discipleship (1:7-8; 2:2) once Paul is executed! We should all have at least one person to whom we could write a letter like this when we are on our death bed!

Additional highlights from Paul's second letter to Timothy:

If you are experiencing fear doing the work of the Lord, you can be certain that its source is not God! It is either our own foolish insecurities and lack of faith and/or the work of our adversary Satan! (1:7)

True believers are eternally secure because they know whom they have believed (Jesus Christ), and it is He who keeps them saved until that day, not themselves!

(1:12, 4:18)

We are commanded to study the Word of God to make sure that we *“rightly divide it.”* Without diligent *“study”*, it is possible wrongly divide the scripture, and end up twisting it to our own destruction (2:15. See also II Pet. 3:16).

We must not allow ourselves to become discouraged in the mission of reaching people with the gospel, realizing that the lost have been taken captive by Satan himself and are held in his snare. Their only hope is that God would give them *“repentance to the acknowledging of the truth”* through the message of the gospel that has been committed to our trust (2:24-26. See also I Thess. 2:4).

Paul clearly calls the scriptures that Timothy had as a child (the Old Testament) holy, and says that they were the same scriptures inspired by God which can perfect man! Note: These scriptures Timothy had in his possession were not the original manuscripts (they had long since perished from the earth). What he did have were copies that God had persevered that were just as inspired as the so-called originals, just like we have today in our Authorized Version! (3:15-17)

We have many TEACHERS of the Bible today (on radio, television, and in many churches) just as the Bible has predicted, but not many PREACHERS of the Book! WE MUST PREACH THE WORD! (4:2-4)

Saturday – December 16th, 2017

TODAY'S READING: TITUS-PHILEMON

OVERVIEW: Titus: Order and authority in the local church (chapter 1); sound doctrine for the people of the local church (chapter 2); the biblical way to deal with heretics (chapter 3). Philemon: The Apostle Paul's letter to his friend Philemon regarding his unfaithful slave Onesimus, asking him to forgive and accept Onesimus back into his house, not just as a slave, but as a brother in the Lord.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Titus: Titus was a man that the apostle Paul often relied upon because he was trustworthy and faithful. In fact, Paul called Titus his "partner and fellow helper" (2 Cor. 8:23) in the work of the Lord. This letter from Paul to Titus was written to give instruction on how to strengthen and establish the young churches on the island of Crete. Paul wanted to make sure that Titus dealt with the Cretians, who were known for being liars, evil and lazy (see Titus 1:11. Does that sound familiar at all?)

In this letter we learn of the qualifications for leaders in the church and the absolute necessity of teaching sound doctrine (because there are many false teachers whose mouths must be stopped – Titus 1:10-11). The sound doctrine that is supposed to be taught is found in chapters 2 and 3. In these chapters we find sound doctrine for older men, older women, younger women, younger men and servants. In chapter 3, Paul commands Titus to remind all in the church of their past sinful condition and the amazing kindness and love that God has shown to all of them. He also very clearly lays out the method for dealing with heretics (those who do not hold and/or teach sound doctrine). He ends the letter with a reminder to us all to "*learn to maintain good works*" so that we do not become unfruitful (Titus 3:14).

Additional highlights from Paul's letter to Titus:

Be very discerning, because false teachers profess that they know God, and can present a spiritual looking front (Titus 1:16). Upon closer examination, however, they actually deny God with the life that they live. In the end, it isn't their profession that will matter, only God's! Jesus said in Matthew 7:23, "*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*"

The same grace that saves us also teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Titus 2:11-12). That is why Paul said in Romans 6:1-2, *“Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?”* If you understand what Jesus did for you in saving you from your sin, you will then stand in awe of His grace daily, and sin will no longer have dominion over you! That is how grace teaches us to live a life pleasing to our Saviour!

Philemon: In this brief Book of the Bible, God paints for us a beautiful picture of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Philemon was a personal friend of Paul, whom he had apparently had the privilege of leading to the Lord (vs. 19). One of Philemon’s slaves, a man by the name of Onesimus, had apparently stolen from his master and fled to Rome. As often is the case, one sin leads to another, so Onesimus finds himself imprisoned in Rome. It is in this Roman prison that Paul meets Onesimus (whom Paul probably recognized as being Philemon’s servant – obviously, this didn’t just happen by chance!), and leads him to the Lord. Paul realized that if Onesimus was ever to be all that God wanted him to be, he would need to make things right with his master Philemon. So Paul writes this short letter to his friend and fellow Christian, Philemon, asking him not only to receive Onesimus back into his house as a slave, but now, as a brother in the Lord!

Note some of the incredible pictures God paints for us in the letter to Philemon:
Philemon – pictures God the Father

1. He was righteous. (vs. 7 c.f. Jer. 23:6)
2. He was wealthy. (vs. 2, 7, 11 c.f. Hag. 2:8)
3. The church was his habitation. (vs. 2 c.f. Eph. 2:22)
4. He was a caring householder. (vs. 2, 5, 7 c.f. Eph. 2:19)
5. He had been violated. (vs. 11, 18-19 c.f. Rom. 3:23)
6. He was the legal owner. (vs. 16 c.f. I Cor. 6:20)

Onesimus – pictures us, as redeemed sinners

1. He was a slave. (vs. 16 c.f. Rom. 7:14)
2. He was an unprofitable servant. (vs. 11 c.f. Matt. 25:30; Rom. 5:12)
3. He desired freedom. (vs. 15 c.f. Gen. 3:1-6)
4. His quest for freedom found him imprisoned. (vs. 10 c.f. Rom. 6:17)
5. In desperation, he received God’s liberating grace! (vs. 11 c.f. Eph. 2:8-9)

Paul – pictures Jesus Christ

1. He was a prisoner on behalf of the gospel. (vs. 10 c.f. Isa. 53:8; Jn. 18:28)
2. He intercedes to the wealthy householder for the unprofitable servant.(vs.10-11c.f.Heb.7:25)
3. He will do nothing without the householder's permission. (vs. 14 c.f. John 6:38)
4. He was determined to pay the servant's debt. (vs. 18-19 c.f. I Tim. 2:6)
- 5.He asks that the rebellious be received just as He would be received.(vs.12,17c.f.Rom.8:17)
6. He secures for the restored a place to dwell. (vs. 22 c.f. John 14:1-2)
7. He soon returns to the householder. (vs. 22 c.f. John 14:5)

Wow! What a book! Why don't you take a few minutes to stand in awe of God's unbelievable Word right now (Psalm 33:8).