

HISTORY OF REDEMPTION

BY

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Lesson 16 The Living Epistles

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Well, let's pray.

Father, we do want to say thanks for this lovely day that we have to worship You and to live here on earth; moving, living, having our being in You—just acknowledging that You are the Creator. You made this earth the way it is and made us the way we are and everything fits so beautifully, really. And we want to acknowledge and worship You as the great Designer, the great Creator that You are, Lord. And that is just the most amazing thing of all, Lord. How You have loved us and drawn us and called us by Your everlasting love that is in Christ. And as we look through Your Word, Lord, we see it from beginning to end, that theme that You have given us, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the theme of redemption, the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. And we come to worship You through Him. And we rejoice in Christ Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

Revelation 11:15 says,

The kingdom of the world of our Lord and of His Christ has begun. And He shall reign unto the ages of the ages. And the twenty-four elders and those that sat on their thrones before God, fell on their faces, worshiped God and said, “We give thanks to Thee, O Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast reigned [or have begun to reign].”

And so they start announcing that there is going to be this reign, this kingdom. And it has to be to fulfill says Psalm 2:8. You know, while the nations are raging and laughing and saying, “Lord, You won’t rule over us. No way! It won’t happen.” And they are resisting God. And it says that God sits in heaven and just kind of basically goes, “Yeah, right. Like that is not going to happen.” And it is. He sends His Son back and He rules with a rod of iron.

Now, why does it have to happen? Let me give you seven reasons why I think this kingdom actually has to happen and will happen.

The first one is this: It has to happen because of the character of God, His integrity. It is His honor. It is His majesty. He is the one that says to us in Matthew 25:34, “Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

In other words, God Almighty undertook a work and said, “This is what I am going to do.” If He does not finish it and do it—I mean, how can He not accomplish it if He is Lord God Almighty? His very character and integrity demands that we get to that point where the kingdom is inherited by those it has been planned for. And we know that is going to be both Jews and gentiles. But there has to be that fulfillment of the new covenant promises for this to take place. And so it will.

Secondly, one of the reasons it needs to take place is to establish perfect government on earth. We have always wanted it. It is like that is what God intended from the beginning was earth to be governed perfectly, that we have dominion over the earth. He wanted Adam to do that. Adam could not do it because of his rebellion against God. It did not happen. He failed. A new man came and that was the incarnate Son of God. And He established rule for God. He established obedience to God and it was Jesus Christ. When He returns He will set up the perfect government.

In Matthew 19:28 He said, “In the regeneration, you twelve guys are going to sit on twelve thrones judging Israel.” Now, does that sound like that is real or not? That is what He said. You twelve guys will sit on twelve thrones and you will judge Israel.

So it has to happen for Him to set up the right kind of government on earth. Isaiah 1:26 says,

I will restore thy judges as at the first, [just like it used to be] as at the beginning. And you shall be called the city of righteousness, a faithful town.

So He has to come and do the perfect government that He promised. It will happen.

Thirdly, He is going to restore harmony between God and His creation, between the supernatural and the natural. Right now there is kind of a dichotomy between the supernatural and the natural. But it is going to be restored. There will be the original kind of concord that God intended to exist. But that requires a supernatural king and Jesus Christ will effect that when He comes. And all the harmony that was supposed to exist will be there because of Jesus and the changes that take place because they will be supernatural.

Fourthly, He is going to redeem the earth from the curse. He said He would. He said He would remove all the labor and the pain and the groaning and the toiling. He is going to remove that, all those grievous times. That is what will happen.

Fifthly, He is going to fulfill all of God’s eternal covenants made with Israel. He will fulfill the Abrahamic covenant completely. He will fulfill the Davidic covenant. There will be a king in David’s land. The land covenant will be fulfilled, everything about it. Part of that is that He promised in the covenant they would get a new heart, didn’t He? And they would keep His law. He will fulfill that by the new covenant. He will fulfill the new covenant by giving Israel a new heart, and He will put His Spirit in them and they will keep His ways, (cf. Ezekiel 36:26).

Because He already said—remember what He told us earlier? He said, “If you change these laws and you teach somebody different than what these laws are, you are least in the kingdom” (cf. Matthew 5:19). So He is going to come back and fulfill those things. And they are going to be the people that have always in a wrong way gloried in the law. But they are finally going to glory in the law in the right way because they are going to keep it and God’s Spirit is going to be in them and upon them.

Then sixthly, He has to come back and do it because there has to be a final test of fallen humanity. And that happens. It will happen in the most ideal circumstance, when Jesus Christ, the God/man, the *Theanthropos*, is here on earth ruling with a rod of iron. Satan will have been bound. He won’t be bothering anybody whatsoever. But in spite of that, in Revelation 20, men will prove that the heart is the problem. And one last time, it is like God giving them one more opportunity and they blow it.

And so finally, the seventh thing is there is a full manifestation of the glory of Jesus Christ and His covenant. And what is the full manifestation really of that glory? Isn’t it His love, the fact that He loved them to the end? And His passion, even though they rejected Him, His passion was still to die for them. He said, “O I wish I could have done it now. I wish I could have gathered you now. I wish you could have known all of the peace now.” But they did not. They rejected Him but He still died for them. And He will come back and fulfill it in the future. And so it is just a glorious love, the full manifestation of the glory of God through His love, through His passion.

Paul had it, didn’t he? “O” he says, “I wish I could be accursed for the sake of Israel. I wish they would do it now.” But he knew it wasn’t going to happen right now. You know, a few people here and there; but by and large it will happen to the nation as a whole, and all Israel shall be saved.

And so God is right in the way He has approached these things.

Now how does this affect us? You know, when we read Revelation 19:11, we read that Christ returns with His saints. Secondly, we read Armageddon takes place; then we read Satan is bound. Then we read about the thousand year reign. Then we read that Satan is loosed at the end of the thousand year reign. Then we read about the judgment of Satan. Finally in verse 15, we read the second resurrection and great white throne judgment. So, I mean, God has a plan. He is keeping with it. The kingdom will be established and it makes us, you know, completely victorious.

I want to think about just how the parables that Jesus told, after He was rejected, relate to the church. Turn to Revelation 2 and 3 and let's just take a look at that for a moment because there is a relationship there.

The first parable that He told was the Parable of the Sower who went out and he sowed (cf. Matthew 13:18). And when he sowed, he sowed among wheat and tares. Isn't that interesting? And so, this time of sowing and organization, this time of evangelism, was also connected with a time of what?—a time of great persecution. What was the first church in the book of Revelation 2–3? It was Ephesus, wasn't it? It is the desirable church, the apostolic church that went out. It was a real, true situation. And as he was sowing the wheat and the tares, and as they began to, you know, truly evangelize and take the gospel out because of their first love for Him, things began to happen. But later, what began to happen? Tares began to spring up and because of the tares, what also took place in the church?—great persecution. And when you read in church history, what do you read that was the big problem in the church during the second time of great periods of history, was the church of Smyrna.

After Ephesus comes Smyrna, which means myrrh referring to that embalming fluid, referring to death, referring to that persecution that took place there. What was the big problem in church history during this period, during this time? Wasn't it? We had those people that were confessors? It was those people that rejected and those people that stood up in times of persecution. And it created a hard problem in the church because after the persecutions went over, you had two groups. You had the guy sitting next to you who

was persecuted for his faith because he would not offer to Caesar and he would not do these other things. Then you had the other person sitting next to him who just took the easy way out. And so it created a real problem because some people stood up publicly and were persecuted for it and others went and hid. And there was this huge problem in the church because there was this wheat and tares (cf. Matthew 13:36). And we know already that many people told on other Christians. They said, “We are going to take your home. You are going to lose your job. You are going to prison if you don’t tell us where those other Christians are.” And they told. You think that would cause a problem? Man!

And so there was wheat and there were tares. And that is what happened in those first two churches. That is what happened in history.

And then the third parable that He told was what?—the mustard seed (cf. Matthew 13:31). Pergamos means “by marriage.” Literally *per* means by and *gamos* means marriage. And so they married the world. And so we see that mustard seed, the tree that grew up and had all kinds of birds lodging in its branches, and all the worldly influence that is there, which began to develop during that time.

Then the fourth parable He told was about the leaven that a woman hid (cf. Matthew 13:33) and the church of Thyatira. And that is interesting because that is when we see that continual sacrifice and those doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church developing. And you know their great emphasis was on a woman. It was on Mary and the Immaculate Conception, et cetera. Interesting how it plays out in church history there.

Then the fifth parable He tells is the treasure that is hidden (cf. Matthew 13:44). And that is the church of Sardis. The escaping ones that escaped out of that situation that was in Thyatira. They escaped from that leaven that leavens the whole lump. They removed it. They got out. And that was the Reformation. And so there was this treasure hid there even within that government. There were guys like Luther and others that were part of the Roman Catholic Church but they were treasures hidden in there. And they brought forth true doctrines. And finally were forced out of the church. They did not want to leave the

church. They were forced out of the church because they were treasures hidden within the church.

And then the sixth one was the pearl of great price (cf. Matthew 13:46), which He gave everything to buy that field to get that pearl. And it is like that is Philadelphia; that is the love that was demonstrated there. That was the true church taking the gospel out, I believe.

And the final church, Laodicea, was the dragnet parable, a parable about judgment that was coming (cf. Matthew 13:47). And so, you see this similarity in the progress here in church history of what is going to happen.

And I think the reason there is a relationship between the parables that Jesus told in Matthew 13 and the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 is because in chapter 12, after Jesus knew they were rejecting Him as the King, He moved and started telling the parables. But the parables have a relationship to how, after His rejection, history continues to unfold until they finally come back and receive Him. But that does not happen until He comes back in judgment, after the great tribulation period.

So yeah, I see some interesting things concerning the kingdom. I believe when Jesus came the first time, in the Gospels, that He was the God/Man. He was the Messiah. He did come to fulfill and I really believe He offered them, a bona fide offer of a real kingdom, but they rejected it as a nation. And so He turned to the gentiles.

And now it does not matter whether you are a Jew or gentile, bond or free, male or female, you come to the Lord all the same way, until the times of the gentiles is fulfilled. But then, I think He will go back and fulfill the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 to the actual nation.

And so Jesus speaks the fifth time through His Son, Jesus Christ, and promises fulfillment of everything. And we will see the fulfillment of that at His second coming.

So, do you see the need to sum up everything? And God did it in Christ. You see the content, how it was about Christ and how He fulfills it and it cannot be fulfilled without Him personally. That is why He has to come back. It has to be Him personally. All these things are connected to Him personally. There cannot be a fulfillment of all these things without the personal Son, Jesus Christ, on earth. It is personal. He went out of His way to show the content was about Him.

And the method was an incarnation. The response is: “Yeah, come to Him.” And all who do are saved and blessed.

So the sixth time God speaks and we’ll look at the epistles. And then finally, the last time, the Revelation, when all these things are consummated. And then we will make a comparison of the seven times that He spoke, we will compare with the seven times He acted. And we will go over covenant and dispensational theology in detail.

The fifth time God spoke was in His Son, the incarnation. And the need at the time was to sum up all that God had said and center truth in the person of His Son. Truth had to become real in terms of the person. And so He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, incarnate.

And the content was about what? Fulfilling and clarifying everything God had ever said or ever would say. God wanted to clarify it in a way we could understand it and never miss it. And so He put it into the person, the God/Man, so that Jesus would live here among us and we would have no doubt about what God was trying to communicate. By sending His Son, living a holy, righteous, just life, fulfilling all the law of God and the word of God and then dying on the cross for us. I mean, we could not miss that; and then God raising Him from the dead. That is a tremendous picture there.

And the content that Jesus taught often had seed thoughts in it. Like, He would say in John 13 remember, “Love one another.” But we get to the epistles and it explains it in more detail. And so He wanted to just sum up and clarify things.

And then the response that He expects is what?—come to Jesus and receive Jesus—that is the response that He expects.

The Epistles
The sixth major time God spoke
Romans – Jude

**The Holy Spirit is with you, He shall be in you,
and He shall come upon you.**

“He shall lead you into all truth.”

Now, today, we will go on and look at the epistles. The sixth time that God speaks is in Romans to Jude. He had said, “He [the Holy Spirit] shall lead you into all truth” (cf. John 16:13). That the Holy Spirit is with you, but He shall be in you and He shall come upon you. And that is what has happened.

The historical background for the epistles is obviously in the book of Acts, because Acts proclaims Jesus, but the epistles explain Jesus. So we see them, you know, they leave us in Rome in the book of Acts. And then the first Epistle we begin with is the book of Romans. And the epistles explain the Christian life. They defend the faith.

So how are they organized normally? You will have doctrine first and then you will have practical experience second. Ephesians is a classic example. The first three chapters are

all about doctrine. And the last three chapters are all about how to apply that doctrine in life. And that is normally the way the epistles are written.

Now what is the need? Well, the epistles are written to whom?—those that had heard the gospel. They had believed unto salvation. “In Him you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). So these people had really believed the gospel unto salvation.

They were filled with the Spirit of God. “Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:14). And they had the gifts of the Spirit, “So that you come short in no gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:7). And they were witnessing in power we know from the book of Acts. “For from you the word of the Lord is sounded forth, not only from Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out so that we do not even need to say anything” (1 Timothy 1:8).

The Need Is Twofold:

- **To understand the essential nature of salvation; to know our provision in Christ.**
- **To know how to work it out in life and service; appropriating our provision in Christ.**

So these people had believed to salvation. They were filled with Spirit. They had the gifts of the Spirit. And they were witnessing in power. That is who they were. Well, you know what the need is then, for a group like that? Well, the need was to understand the essential nature of salvation and to know all of our provision in Christ. And secondly, it was to know how to work it out in life and service and to possess and use our provision in Christ.

So the epistles were written in a personal letter format, explaining the Christian life and the responsibilities that we have because of what has been provided for us. In other words, God has given us the grace for life in Christ Jesus and if He has given us Christ, how will He not give us everything else with Christ? Since He has given us Christ and the grace and life of Christ, we have absolutely no excuses when we do not live up to the responsibilities that He has put upon us, because we have the power. We have the dynamic. We have the ability. And the epistles explain to us what we have in Christ and who we are in Christ, but also what our obligation and responsibility is to live up to Christ. So we are living epistles. And as Christ represented the Father, we now represent Christ on earth. And so the need is to know that.

The Content

The foundational concept of the Epistles is that this new salvation is anchored in a new relationship with a risen Savior.

"In Christ" is found throughout Paul's Epistles.

Key Verse:

"But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus..."

(1Corinthians 1:30)

Well, what is the content? The content, the foundational content of the epistle is that this new salvation is anchored in a new relationship with a risen Savior. Life is in Christ, not in us, but in Christ. And the source of this new life is not in the believer, as you might naturally think. But it is in Jesus Christ. And that is why we need to know about Him and what is provided in Him. So we must learn that he or she is united with Christ. “In Christ” is found throughout Paul’s epistles. I think we find it like 132 times. And you just go, wow, it is all about being in Christ. And that captures the truth of our union with Christ.

So the key verse is 1 Corinthians 1:30. It says, “Of Him”—that is, it is God’s doing. He is the source. He is the one that has done this. “Of Him are you”—that is who you are because of what God has done for you and to you. “Of Him are you in Christ Jesus.” God has done a wonderful work and it is that of putting you in Christ Jesus. And so that is now who you are and the content is all about what God has done and what He has made you in Christ Jesus. So, it is about who and what Christ is and who and what we are in Christ.

And the Person of Christ, He is our wisdom. He is our justification. He is our sanctification. He is our service. He is our glorification. He is our patience. He is our compassion. He is our hope. I mean, He is our life. Christ is just everything to us. And we have everything that He is. So, “All things are of Him, through Him, and to Him” (Romans 11:36).

So the epistles deal with just about every problem that a believer could face. And the basic issues are dealt with in Romans and first and second Corinthians. Life problems are addressed in the general epistles. And then of course the pastoral epistles, Timothy and Titus, address their special problems.

Now we will take just a quick look at them. The book of Romans shows Christ as our righteousness. It is all about who Christ is and what we have in Him. 1 Corinthians shows

that Christ is our Lord. And the answer to every problem in the church is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We know that. I mean, Romans 1:17 tells us about the righteousness of God.

But 1 Corinthians is about the Lordship. He is Lord both of the dead and the living. He should solve the division problems of the church when we recognize His lordship. We have got everybody saying, "I am of this" and "I am of that." But when we see that there is one church, one body, as it teaches us in 1 Corinthians. So there is one hope, one baptism. He is promoting His lordship. And the key word throughout the whole book of 1 Corinthians is Lordship. That is the answer to every problem in the church. And it still is today. And 1 Corinthians shows us that Christ is Lord and He is Lord of all. And if we bow to His Lordship, it would solve a lot of divisions and problems in the churches today. But that is the real issue there. You know, even when we go to the supper there, communion, it is called what? It is called the Lord's Supper. Everything in the book is about the Lord. He is Lord and that is the theme of it.

Second Corinthians is about Christ as our sufficiency, that we have everything in Christ. And the ministry of reconciliation is committed to us because God was in Christ. And that is why we are so sufficient. God was in Christ, the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form and now Christ is in us. So He always causes us to what? Triumph. We can always triumph because the fullness of the Godhead was in Christ and Christ is in us. How can we not triumph? We are so sufficient in Christ. There is no way that we cannot triumph. We are new creatures in Christ Jesus. And so, 2 Corinthians speaks all about how sufficient we are. And it brings it down to the simplicity that is there in Christ. We have His life; therefore, we have everything that makes us sufficient for life and ministry. We lack nothing. And He makes that clear in 2 Corinthians.

In Galatians we see that Christ is our liberty there. And it is all about the Spirit. And where the Spirit of the Lord is there is tremendous liberty there and the freedom that we have in Christ because He is living in us. And the life we live now really is a life of freedom because we are not in bondage in any way because it is Christ living His life in us. And we are living it by the faith of the Son of God. There is tremendous freedom

throughout the book. Paul is in travail, obviously, to have Christ formed in them because he wants them to have this new experience, this new birth and this freedom when Christ is formed in you. So there is a liberty and a freedom of living in the Spirit of Christ there. And it is really neat. I mean, Christ was cursed for the whole purpose that the promise of the Spirit could come to us, he says. That is the way it is presented. So it is all about the Spirit and the freedom we have in the Spirit.

Now Ephesians is about Christ being our all in all. And of course, we see “in Christ” there more than any other epistle and the unity that we have. The one body defined in Ephesians. And so the whole concept of being in Christ and walking worthy of being in Christ and our position in Christ; it is a tremendous epistle. Christ is our all in all.

In Philippians Christ is obviously our joy, but it is a gospel joy. And we have the attitude of Christ and “we can do all things through Christ” (cf. Philippians 4:13). And so it is about joyful Christian living, you might say, as Paul said, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). So he has tremendous joy because of the hope that he has. And he counts everything just rubbish for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. That is the greatest gain in his life, knowing Christ. And so just tremendous joy in carrying out the gospel and being in this relationship with Christ. There is tremendous joy in humbling himself, in serving other people by carrying out the gospel. It is all about Christ and our gospel joy in Him.

In Colossians, Christ is our life and we are complete. We are absolutely perfect and complete in Christ. We have a new position in Him. We have a new relationship in Him. We have a new fellowship in Him. We are made perfect and complete in every way. Because Christ is in you, you have the hope of glory. And your life, he says, “is hidden with Christ in God” (cf. Colossians 3:3). That is where your life is. And that is why he says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16). Let it dwell richly in you because Christ is your life from beginning to end.

And when we get to 1 Thessalonians, we see that He is our hope. And He is the coming One. At the end of every chapter, all five chapters in 1 Thessalonians mention the second coming of Jesus Christ because that is our hope. And he just shows us that our hope is to be set completely, fixed completely on the second coming of Jesus Christ. And it is all about that kind of a living hope that we have in Him. So it is the gospel of hope. Christian conduct is seen there in the light of hope. That is why it mentions faith, love and then hope is third. It is not faith, hope, and love. But it is faith, love, and then hope. And we have these things because of the hope that we have in Christ.

Then you get to 2 Thessalonians and you see Christ and He is our returning Lord. It speaks of the day of the Lord over and over there. And it is a picture of Christian history. And in chapter 1 you have a revelation of who Christ is. In chapter 2 you have a revelation of who the antichrist is. So first you get a revelation of Jesus Christ, then you get the revelation of the false christ, or the antichrist who is a fake christ. And then chapter 3 tells you what your responsibility is when you live between the revelation of Christ and the revelation of the antichrist. And it lays out the responsibilities in chapter 3 of a Christian in light of this real view of history. So, as God looks at it, there are only two men being revealed in these last days. One is Christ and the one is the false christ. And what is our responsibility and how should we relate to that? Well, that is found in 2 Thessalonians 3 and the day of the Lord. It is going to be a day where He comes back in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God and obey not the gospel. And so certainly a lot of our responsibility that he explains there is about us taking the gospel out because the Lord is returning. The day of the Lord is coming and it is coming soon.

Then in 1 Timothy, we see Christ as our teacher. And we are to know what our calling is. And he explains that in 1 Timothy pretty well. He is the pastor of the church, you might say. He is the one that made the good confession there. And so Timothy is the teacher and he is the pastor.

In 2 Timothy we see that He is our example. Actually, Titus would come after the book of 1 Timothy where he tells us not only to know what our calling is, but Titus tells us to enter our calling which is good works. And it is all about the good works. But 2 Timothy is about remaining and abiding in your calling. And Christ was our example and left us an example of suffering and how we are to guard the gospel and suffer for the gospel, endure hardship for the gospel, be a good soldier for the gospel. And it is all about perseverance and endurance there.

And so in the book of Titus, Christ is our pattern of good works there. So this is our method, you might say, for discipleship. Then in the book of Philemon, Christ is the master of relationships. It does not matter whether you are a slave or a free man. He tells you how you can have a relationship and how that relationship is based on Christ and your oneness in Christ there, so it is how we should behave in that respect, in just a real brotherly relationship. And He does change every relationship in life.

And then in Hebrews He is our intercessory high priest, no doubt. And He is at the throne. As a matter of fact, in Hebrews 13:10 He is our altar. We have an altar and the altar is Jesus and this is what faith in Christ does. So, we become partakers of that and it kind of explains the new covenant in a lot of ways as well. But ultimately we would have to say it is Christ the intercessor at the throne; that He really is our altar in every way in His new ministry.

Then in James, He is our pattern, you might say. It is very practical. James and the Sermon on the Mount, have a great relationship to one another. And there are 54 imperatives in the book. I mean, it is just filled with you got to do this and you got to do that. And you must do this and you must do that. It is a very imperative book, saying, "This is the pattern. This is the way you have got to walk." He expects it and it is very practical in terms of life. It explains how to love your neighbor in a practical way and not showing partiality for one. He is very practical in these relationships.

In the book of 1 Peter, He is the cornerstone. And the message is primarily the true grace of God because it is built on the cornerstone of grace. And grace is what God did. And what God did was make Jesus Christ, the stone that was rejected, the very foundation cornerstone of our faith. And it is receiving that grace. And then he tells us how we can work that grace out in Christ. And it is all about the true grace of God.

Then 2 Peter is about the true knowledge and how He is our strength. And the resources that we have, His divine power, His life, His divine nature, and how He rescues us from temptation. And the best polemic against any kind of apostasy is just a godly life. And it comes from knowing our resources, a true knowledge of Christ there in 2 Peter, because He is our strength for life.

In the book of 1 John, obviously Christ is our light and our fellowship, our advocacy. You know, we are born of Him and we have eternal life. It says, “We are in Him who is true and in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” So, we have His life and fellowship. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (cf. 1 John 5:20).

In 2 John, Christ is our truth. There are thirteen verses in 2 John. In five verses, he mentions the word “truth.” So the theme is on truth and the caution is against false teachers. So he explains Christ’s relationship with false teachers, particularly in verse 10. And we should abide in the teaching of Christ.

In 3 John it is about Christ being the way. The word walk is used and the way is either humility or pride. That is what he contrasts there. And our way is humility. So it is about how Christ walked in humility and about how we walk in humility.

The book of Jude is about us being preserved and kept, being guarded to the very last day. And he contrasts these men: “but you,” he says it several times...“these men, but you.” And how we are to live, but how we are guarded. The faith that was once for all delivered to the saints should be guarded as well there.

And then finally, in the book of Revelation, we have the final consummation of the true King of kings and Lord of lords.

So, in the epistles we are just seeing Christ explained and what we have in Christ explained over and over. And as we see Him, we then draw, by the Spirit, who He is to live off. We feed on Him. We abide in Him. And that is one of the neat things about having devotions and having devotional time, is like, you get alone, you see Christ. And when you truly see Him, you start feeding on Him. And you start realizing, “Oh, He is my kindness. I do not need kindness, I have Christ. Christ is the kindness in me. I do not need patience. Christ is the patience in me. I do not need love. Christ is the love in me. I do not need humility. Christ is the humility that is in me.” All of these things that we need in life, we have in Christ. But we only experience them when we truly see Him by revelation and feed upon Him. And all of that is in the epistles and it is a beautiful picture.

And then the book of Romans is the most complete and systematic of all the epistles, the theme being the righteousness of God. You see in the first eight chapters, doctrinal salvation. And it is all about the sins, you might say, that have been forgiven us. And therefore, we have grace and we can live and do the Christian life. The foundation is grace, which is found in Romans 3. The means by which you access it is faith there. And the result of it is assurance.

And when we have this life, then we live and do it. We see in Romans chapters 6 through 8, the practical way that we live and do the Christian life. That is all about doctrinal salvation and the righteousness that we have in Christ. That we are actually made righteous, but we also live righteousness because of Christ.

Then chapters Romans 9 through 11 I think is the keystone and arc of the book because it is the righteousness of God. It is a dispensational history of the calling of Israel. It is a true history in terms in God’s view. He elected them and He rejected them, but He will

convert them in the end. And so it is God's view. You cannot divide the epistle properly, and you cannot divide the Word of God properly without error or confusion until you see God's view and God's place of Israel. So God gives you His view of real history in Romans 9 through 11. And if you miss His view of history, you miss the keystone and the arc of the book because it is about how God is righteous in all of His dealings in history, particularly as they relate to the election, the rejection, and the conversion of Israel. And He has every right to do that.

And then in the last part of the book of Romans 12 through 15, you see righteousness in terms of practical behavior. These are the living principles that we are to live by. And we see the mutuality there of the body of Christ. We see the obligations we have in brotherly love. And we see the consideration we ought to have for one another. And he addresses all of those practical things. So, as you go through this, we are justified and that means we are just declared righteous. We are sanctified and that means we are actually made righteous. And that is happening now. And he says, "Don't be deceived." Jesus even said it. "He who practices righteousness is righteous" (1 John 3:7). And he who doesn't, well, you know them by their fruit. You know them by their life. Jesus asked the question, "Can the fountain send forth bitter and sweet at the same time? No. Can a fig tree produce olives? No. Can a vine produce figs? No" (cf. James 3:17). He says that it does not happen. Do not be deceived. It is very simple. If there is reality there, if there is true sanctification, there will be fruit of their righteous life.

And then finally, glorification is simply righteousness achieved. And that is achieved when Christ is revealed and we are revealed with Him in glory. And we will be complete and perfect in every way, having our new glorified bodies.

And so it is about justification, sanctification, glorification that we have in Christ. So, you know it is a beautiful picture. And that is the content of the epistles.

The Method

Personal letters to “living epistles”

**Explanatory letters develop
the life in Christ.**

**This method trains the *minds and hearts*
of “living epistles” and the truth
becomes their own.**

Now, what is the method? Well, pretty simple. We see the need. We see the content. And we see the method here. The method is just personal letters to living epistles. Explanatory letters develop implications and obligations that are part of the life in Christ. God is concerned with developing the life of the believer and growth and maturity, growth in grace. So the method trains your mind and heart so that truth becomes your own. And you become a living epistle. And that is why God chose this method of writing. So our need to grow into maturity is met, in some ways, by the very method itself. Showing us that we really are living epistles and He wrote letters, *epistles*, to living epistles so that they could grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And it is a great method. It works well.

The Response Required

Appropriate Christ by faith

- Realize by revelation all you have and are in Christ.
- Reckon to be true all that you are and have in Christ.
- Receive and rest in all you have and are in Christ.

And then finally, what is the response He expects? He wants us to appropriate, by faith, Christ and all that He is; realize by revelation, all that you have and are in Christ. Then reckon it to be absolutely true, what you are and what you have in Christ. It is a done deal. And then to receive it by faith, to yield and submit to it to the point that you can really rest in it. That it is yours. And so the response is simply an appropriation of who Christ is. And so that is what is in the epistles.

Let's pray and thank the Lord for what we have in the epistles.

Lord, we want to just say thank You that You have left us here to be Your representatives, to be Your ambassadors. And that You are still calling out to the world saying, "Be reconciled." And You have chosen us as living epistles to do that, to reach out and show the world who You are. That You have not left Yourself without witness. We are Your witnesses. And we cannot do it in our own strength. And then we start reading the epistles and we begin to see You

and realize that, oh, You are our life. You are our sufficiency. You are our strength. You are our hope. You are our justification. You are our sanctification. You are everything. And so Lord, we thank You for the epistles and how rich they are concerning You. Lord, the joy that we have found in You, the hope and the love. Lord, how wonderful it truly is. And we just thank You for it. May we grow in Christ. We pray in Jesus name, amen.

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