

STUDIES IN THE BIBLE



The Epistles

Lesson 23

Many religions have been devoid of any high standard of morality. Such was paganism in the first century. Set in bold contrast to the idolatry of the Greeks and Romans was the religion of Jesus Christ which presented to the world the highest moral principles it has ever known.

Although we often overlook the fact, the greater portion of the New Testament was written to churches and individuals to instruct them in the art of Christian living. It is these twenty-one books which we will study in this lesson. Of these Paul wrote fourteen. Seven others called general epistles or letters (possibly because they were addressed to Christians generally) were penned by four other writers whose names they bear. Paul's writings are known by the name of the church or individual to which they were written. The principles set forth in these books apply to us as well as they did to the early Christians.

The Epistles Of Paul

Four of Paul's letters were written to individuals and eight to specific congregations. Galatians was addressed to the churches of the province of Galatia.

Hebrews, believed to have been written by Paul, was sent to Jewish Christians. These epistles vary widely in their nature. While Philemon is extremely personal, Romans is a detailed treatise on justification by faith. Some letters deal with internal church problems; some are highly complimentary, some very critical. Always Paul sought to write those things most needed by his fellow Christians, many of whom had been converted through his preaching.



Romans was written before Paul ever visited Rome. How the church there began we do not know, except that nothing in the Bible indicates that either Peter or Paul established it. The first eleven chapters of Romans are designed to show that we are justified by faith, not by works of merit. They are a masterpiece of logic. The last five chapters, on the other hand, are largely given to exhortation on Christian living.

I and II Corinthians were addressed to the church in Corinth which had been established by Paul. After he left the congregation numerous problems arose — division, incest, brother going to law with brother, marriage problems, spiritual gifts, the nature of the resurrection, etc. In his first epistle Paul deals with all of these in a firm yet kindly manner. The second epistle indicates that the previous letter had corrected some of these difficulties. It also discusses at length the contribution Paul was asking the Corinthians to make to the poverty-stricken Judean Christians. The New Testament lays great stress on the importance of caring for the poor and needy.

Galatians — The churches of Galatia were beset by Judaizing teachers who told them that Christ's teachings were merely an addition to the Law of Moses. This letter was written to correct that idea and to show that while the Law of Moses was a law of bondage, the teachings of Christ are those of liberty. Paul sums it up, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; **ye are fallen from grace.**" (Gal. 5:4.) This shows that it is possible for a Christian to fall from grace and be lost.

Ephesians, Philipians, and Colossians were all written during Paul's Roman imprisonment to the churches in Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse. Ephesians emphasizes the unity of the church, showing that Christ has broken down the wall between Jews and Gentiles. The grace of God and family relationships are also discussed at length. Philipians is almost devoid of adverse criticism. It is a letter of encouragement for those who face suffering, especially the final chapter. Colossians stresses the preeminence of Christ and what it means to be in Him.

I and II Thessalonians, written to the church at Thessalonica, deal with the second coming of Christ which had troubled this congregation. Some of the Christians had thought Christ's coming so near that they had stopped working and Paul found it necessary to reprove them.

I and II Timothy and Titus were written to two young preachers who had been sent by Paul to assist churches he had established. He advised them how to handle problems, how to select elders, and gave them advice as to their personal lives.

Philemon is a letter of one chapter to a Christian of that name on behalf of his runaway slave, Onesimus, whom Paul had converted. Paul sent him back to Philemon requesting that he be received as a brother in Christ.

Hebrews differs from Paul's other writings in that his name nowhere appears. The supremacy of Christ and His covenant is extolled throughout the letter. No other book more clearly shows how the old covenant has been replaced by the new covenant of Jesus Christ.

The General Epistles

James was probably written by the brother of the Lord of that name. It is addressed to Jewish Christians, "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." (James 1:1.) For discussing down to earth problems of Christian living it is unexcelled. Among subjects of special note are the teachings that faith without works is dead and that the Christian must control his tongue.

I Peter was designed to steady the church under great persecution. Written from Babylon, it shows that it is a glory to suffer for Christ. In **II Peter** the apostle warns against false teachers and shows that the judgment of God is certain. The third chapter contains a vivid description of Christ's second coming. Peter tells us that on that day "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (II Peter 3:10.) This shows the error of those who contend that the earth will not be destroyed when Christ returns.

I, II, and III John were written by the Apostle John, also author of the gospel of John which should not be confused with these books. The word "love" is the key to the wonderful epistle of I John. It is used 44 times in five short chapters. John tells us that we should love one another as God first loved us. II John, the shortest book in the Bible, is addressed to "the elect lady". We cannot be sure who she was. The epistle warns, "Whosoever **goeth onward** and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son." (II John 9 — A.S.V.) III John is addressed to Gaius and commends him for his faithfulness, but warns against a Diotrephes who loved to have "the preeminence".

Jude — The writer of this book was the brother of James, probably the James who wrote the epistle of that name. Jude is similar to II Peter. It warns of the judgment of God against false teachers and cites numerous examples to show how God has dealt with the unrighteous

“Seek and Ye Shall Find”

Write the name of the epistle or epistles of Paul which answer each question:

1. What book is an appeal on behalf of a runaway slave?
2. What book asks for help for the poverty-stricken Judean Christians?
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3. What book discusses justification by faith at length?
4. What book shows that the new covenant has replaced the old?
5. What three books were written to young preachers?,
....., and
6. What book tells Christians that they have fallen from grace if they try to be justified by the law?
7. What book discusses numerous problems in the church to which it is addressed?
8. What two books deal with the second coming of Christ?
and

Fill in the blanks in these scriptures pertaining to love:

Rom. 13:8 — “Owe no man any thing, but to one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”

Eph. 4:2 — “With all lowliness and, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.”

Gal. 5:14 — “For all the is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy as thyself.”

Eph. 5:2 — “And walk in love, as also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”

I John 4:10 — “Herein is love, not that we loved, but that he loved us, and sent his to be the propitiation for our sins.”

I John 4:21 — “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his also.”

I John 4:7 — “Beloved, let us love one : for love is of God; and every one that loveth is of God, and knoweth God.”

Circle the letter representing the correct answer:

- a b c 1. The book addressed to Gaius is: (a) I John; (b) Jude; (c) III John.
- a b c 2. The word "love" is often used in: (a) James; (b) I John; (c) II Peter.
- a b c 3. The statement that "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" is found in: (a) II Peter; (b) II John; (c) I Peter.
- a b c 4. The book written by the brother of James is: (a) I Peter; (b) Jude; (c) II Peter.
- a b c 5. "The elect lady" is addressed in: (a) I Peter; (b) II John; (c) Jude.
- a b c 6. The book designed to help the church in its persecutions is: (a) James (b) III John; (c) I Peter.
- a b c 7. The letter written to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" is: (a) James; (b) III John; (c) Jude.
- a b c 8. The shortest book in the Bible is: (a) II John; (b) III John; (c) Jude.

Read Romans 12. Write true or false before each statement:

- 1. We (Christians) who are many are many bodies in Christ.
- 2. Love should be without dissimulation. (Note: dissimulation means hypocrisy.)
- 3. Christians should not be slothful in business.
- 4. They should be of different minds.
- 5. They should return evil for evil.
- 6. If your enemy hungers you shouldn't feed him.
- 7. We should overcome evil with good.

Student may write here any comment, question, or request.

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Name..... Grade.....

Address..... Date.....

City..... By.....