

Paul's Epistles (2) and Hebrews

We continue our basic overview of Paul's epistles, then will briefly overview the book of Hebrews.

Colossians

Paul wrote Colossians probably around AD 60, perhaps very close in time to when he wrote Ephesians. He indicates that he was imprisoned at the time (4:3), most likely in Rome or, possibly, Caesarea. Epaphras, one of Paul's coworkers, had helped to teach these brethren the gospel (1:7; 4:12). The letter makes it clear that there were heresies on the rise that denied the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. Consequently, Paul shows that Christ is superior to all since He is the Creator in whom dwells the fullness of deity. Therefore, believers need to seek the things above, where Christ is, so that their lives reflect what it means to serve Him in all their relationships.

1-2 Thessalonians

The background for 1 Thessalonians is found in Acts 17-18, and was likely written around AD 51-52. The church is commended for its example and sounding forth the faith (1:6-8). They had accepted the word of God as it is in truth, and now they are told to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel even though they were suffering hardships for it (2:9-16). Reflecting pagan problems, Paul tells them to live in sexual purity, to



work hard, and to live quiet lives. They were comforted in the fact that those who died in Christ are safely awaiting Christ's return. The day of His return should not come as a surprise if they are living in God's will.

Shortly after the first letter, Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians (likely from Corinth around AD 52) in order to comfort the brethren in their persecutions and to reaffirm that Christ will come. However, they needed to be careful not to be so anxious about His return that they fail to keep doing what they needed to do. They needed to trust God and be diligent.

1-2 Timothy

Timothy was working in Ephesus. Paul wrote 1 Timothy in about AD 63-65, then 2 Timothy in about AD 67 at the end of his life. The primary concern has to do with Timothy's work as an evangelist there in Ephesus. False teachers were creating problems, and Paul stressed the need for sound doctrine and preaching the word. The false teachers were engaging in controversies and speculations that would upset the faith of others (e.g., that the resurrection had already taken place), so Timothy had to set a proper example and pay attention to the Scriptures both personally and publicly. He was instructed about the

need to appoint shepherds who could also teach. Perseverance and reliance on Scripture are both stressed, contrasted with those who promoted error.

Titus

Titus' work in Crete was similar to Timothy's in Ephesus. It was likely written around AD 62. Titus had been left in Crete to "set in order" what was lacking, particularly in the appointment of elders there. Once again, false teachers were upsetting the faith of Christians. Stress is given to the need to teach strong doctrine to all ages and to keep the proper focus and perspective on living the kind of life that glorifies God.

Philemon

Paul was in a Roman prison as he wrote to Philemon, perhaps in about AD 60. The letter is quite personal. Philemon was a brother in Colossae who had a slave, Onesimus, run away. Now Onesimus had become a Christian, and Paul was sending him back to Philemon, not to be a slave, but as a brother. Paul appealed to Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother, as if he were receiving Paul himself. The implications here for slavery and the Christian's understanding of that issue are great. Paul could have ordered, but he appealed. If Philemon received Onesimus as a brother, think of what that would mean for their relationship and how it would change.

Hebrews

Hebrews is an anonymous book likely written before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. This was written to Jewish believers who were now facing persecution that would test their faith. Because of this, they were tempted to return to their former way of life in Judaism. The author, then, stresses who Jesus is—both God and man who died for all and now serves as the great High Priest who ever lives to make intercession. "Better" is a key word, and they were in danger of leaving what was better in Christ to return to what could not save them. Hebrews is filled with connections between the old and new covenants, demonstrating that the new fulfills the old. Instead of abandoning Christ, they needed to persevere, for "we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (10:39). The stress on faith is significant, for it was by faith that the forefathers had pressed on even though they had not seen the promises fulfilled (ch. 11). Therefore, they should be disciplined, focused, and resolved to stay true to Christ and be willing to bear His reproach. "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come" (13:14).

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