



# Bible Student's Notebook™

## The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume VIII  
Issue 197

# Rightly Dividing Paul's Epistles

## The Distinctive Messages of the Prison and Pre-prison Epistles

by – D.L. McCroskey (1902-1991)

Most instructed believers today know that present truth – the truth for the church, which is the Body of Christ – is to be found only in Paul's epistles, from Romans to Philemon. The rest of the Word of God is for us, and is rich in instruction to us, but only in these church epistles do we find the direct doctrines and principles for the present age of grace. Paul plainly states that to him was given this special revelation,

... of the dispensation of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:2-3).

Yet is every statement in Paul's epistles for us today? Are there some things, even in these epistles, that were Jewish and have passed away?

Most believers have not been able to give a very good answer to the first question, and though they believe the second should be answered in the affirmative, they are hard pressed for scriptural proof.

For instance, in I Corinthians 12:28-30 there are certain gifts listed, including the gifts of healing, speaking in tongues and "workers of miracles." In 14:13 Paul writes,

Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

Anyone with a correct understanding of dispensational truth knows that all of these special wonders and miracles were Kingdom signs (Isa-



iah 35:5-6), and belong with the nation Israel, who always requires a sign (I Corinthians 1:22). He knows also that these signs simply do not work today, in spite of all the fantastic modern claims. Further, it is stated in 13:8 that one of these, (i.e., tongues) shall cease.

Again, in Romans 12:6, as well as in I Corinthians, we find the gift of prophecy. This gift also was to cease, as we read in I Corinthians 13:8. It apparently was a gift given by the Holy Spirit in the early church for "edification, exhortation and comfort" of the believers (I Corinthians 14:3), while the Word of God was in the making. After the Word was completed there was no longer any need for any New Testament prophet.

The fact remains that these passages are in Paul's epistles, which we insist are present day truth. If they are for us today, then the Pentecostalists are right. If they are *not* for us today, then we have some explaining to do beyond the fact that things changed, and these sign gifts ceased, for then we must answer the question, "When did the change of order come in, and why did it come in?" ▶

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## The Numerical Structure

Paul wrote thirteen epistles to the church the Body of Christ. This number itself is significant, and shows the amazing perfection of God's Word. Had Paul left out even that small epistle to Philemon, the number would have been twelve, which is the number of Israel throughout the Bible; but the number thirteen goes on beyond to the Gentiles. Paul himself was not one of the twelve apostles. He did not take the place of Judas, as some teach. He was an added apostle, a special apostle, the thirteenth apostle, the apostle to the Gentiles.

Before he went to prison, Paul wrote six epistles, and during his imprisonment he wrote seven others. Six is man's number, the number of weakness, and so it is that in these first six epistles we find the *human side* of the church, with all its faults and failures. The book of Romans opens with the wickedness of this poor, fallen race out of which we have been called. In I Corinthians we find carnality, greed, selfishness and even fornication among those who named the name of Christ, and in Galatians we find backsliding and legalism – all human weakness.

Seven, however, is the number of perfection and completeness. So in the seven Prison Epistles we find the *heavenly side* of the church, seated in the heavenlies in Ephesians, looking at its heavenly Head in Colossians, looking for heaven itself and the coming of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in Philippians.

## The Order of the Epistles

The order in which Paul wrote his epistles is generally believed to be as follows:

I Thessalonians  
II Thessalonians  
Galatians  
I Corinthians  
II Corinthians  
Romans  
Ephesians  
Colossians  
Philemon

## ***Bible Student's Notebook***<sup>™</sup>

*Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal*

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume VIII, No. 197 – July 14, 2009

This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
  - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
  - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
  - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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*Printed Version* (mailed to you)

½ Year (26 issues) – \$25; 1 Year (52 issues) – \$50

### Patriarchs

Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God's Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

*Bible Student's Notebook*<sup>™</sup>

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Philippians  
I Timothy  
Titus  
II Timothy

The first six of these are the Pre-prison Epistles, and the last seven are the Prison Epistles.

### The Dividing Line

There is a three- or four-year gap between the last of the Pre-prison Epistles and the first of the Prison Epistles. During the gap the nation Israel rejected God's final offer of His risen Son as their Lord and Messiah, and a tremendous statement was made in Acts 28:28. It reads as follows:

*Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

This Scripture is the great pillar of demarcation that stands between these two groups of epistles: the Pre-prison Epistles (those written during the period covered by the book of Acts) on one side, and the Prison Epistles (those written after the Acts period) on the other, with Acts 28:28 between them.

|                  |           |             |
|------------------|-----------|-------------|
|                  | <b>A</b>  |             |
| I Thessalonians  | <b>c</b>  | Ephesians   |
| II Thessalonians | <b>t</b>  | Colossians  |
| Galatians        | <b>s</b>  | Philemon    |
| I Corinthians    |           | Philippians |
| II Corinthians   | <b>2</b>  | I Timothy   |
| Romans           | <b>8:</b> | Titus       |
|                  | <b>2</b>  | II Timothy  |
|                  | <b>8</b>  |             |

Although Luke wrote the book of Acts in A.D. 65, the setting aside of Israel in Acts 28:28 seems to have taken place a year earlier, sometime in A.D. 64. In God's mind it was already the beginning of the end of Israel's occupancy of the land. In a few years, A.D. 70, He permitted the Romans to completely remove them.

The Pre-prison Epistles, then, were written during the period of time covered by the book of Acts.

Throughout the book of Acts God was still dealing with the nation of Israel. In the Old Testament they had rejected the Father. In the four Gospels they had rejected the Son, and in the book of Acts they rejected the ministry of God's Spirit, even though He displayed before them great power and the Kingdom signs of healing, miracles, etc.

Yet it is quite evident that God was also bringing in the church, that He was, for a little while, engaged in a two-fold program. He was offering Israel her Messianic hope, though in His fore-knowledge God knew this offer would be rejected, and He would visit the Gentiles,

*... to take out of them a people for His Name (Acts 15:14).*

So in the Pre-prison Epistles we find some things that are Jewish, and which must cease when Israel is set aside. This took place in Acts 28:28, and then we have the Prison Epistles, in which we find the full revelation of the mystery. In these nothing is of Jewish character, nothing temporary, nothing to cease, no signs and no miracles.

The Word does not tell us when Paul received all of the revelations of the mystery, though there is considerable conjecture about it. It seems most probable that the Spirit gave him these revelations as he went along. We know that he received the gospel by special revelation (Galatians 1:12).

Perhaps he received his final and complete revelation of the mystery in prison at Rome, from whence came those high pinnacles of church truth – Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians.

Some may ask, "Why did there have to be Jewish truth at all in the early church epistles?" One reason is that the early assemblies were composed of both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, much of the work began with meetings in synagogues; but the main reason is that since God was not yet through dealing with Israel, His Spirit was still working through the apostles in signs and miracles. Paul himself healed and did other miracles during his Acts period ministry (see Acts 14:8-10; 19:11-12).

(see **PAUL**, page 1906)

# God Showcasing His Grace

by – Curt Downing

While standing in the awe of God's creation, we can repeatedly be distracted by the little shackles of life. How about you? Are you enraged at policy in our nation? Do you stress about your job/finances? How about sports teams? Yes, we're small for certain, but somehow in the enormity of God's plan *we are something*. Not just a token of His grace, but *loved by Him*.



life in His glorious presence.

In its description of heaven, Christian dogma has marginalized truths like Ephesians 1:18 which describe "*the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints*" as merely strumming a harp in heaven singing praises to God. There is so much more; we are working on behalf of God to fulfill His very purpose.

Imagine. Just imagine how those with no hope must feel when confronted by the insignificance of their existence? I'm not saying that those who cannot see God's hand in the universe are not meaningful to their sphere of influence; but the seasons come and go. People they love die. Families split. Kids move on. You look in the mirror and you see an image that is a reminder that you won't matter for long if you do at all. In Ecclesiastes 1:11 we read,

*There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those that are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.*

Yes, we are small.

If the message only affirmed that we are virtually indeterminable it would be bad news. Then there it is. The picture of God incarnate bruised, and forsaken, crushed for our iniquities because of the *vast love* for which He loves us. God demonstrated His love for us in that while we are yet sinners, the Christ died on our behalf. We are reminded that His resurrection from the dead certified that the price paid was sufficient, and that we, too, will be released from the bondage of death into

God is not merely dealing with man and his sins in some far, far away place in the speck of a galaxy called the Milky Way. Rather, God has made our realm central in the rehabilitation of His unfathomable creation. Death has entered the scope of creation in order that that rehabilitation, reconstitution, resurrection and reconciliation are on display.

It is through the church, with Christ as Head, that this creation will have it made known to them the multifarious wisdom of God (Ephesians 1:21-23, 3:9-11). In Ephesians 2:6-7 we are told,

*And He hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

Hold your hat now,

*That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ.*

Our salvation is not merely a gift, but a means of God showcasing His transcendentally magnificent grace and kindness to a universe surrounded by the awesome specter of God's

(see **SHOWCASE**, next page)

**SHOWCASE** (continued from previous page)

hand. It is through the Body of Christ, with Christ as Head, that the sovereignties in the celestial realm will see the true splendor of the majestic God. The NIV translation says that God through the Body of Christ will fill “everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:23).

We are so humbled by the grandeur of God’s creation of the universe. Yet, the enormity of need corresponds to its expanse. Within its clutches are sovereignties, and authorities, and dominions that are seeing its reconciliation and the purpose of God through these very infinitesimal specks: **us** (the out-called ones); the very specks that we too often think are so minute and insignificant.

Isn’t it just like God to cut us down to nothing

and then fill us to overflowing?

*Jesus made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the **form of a servant**, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God highly **exalted** Him, and has given Him a Name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:7-9).*

I remember a little Christian song that had a chorus in it whose words sang, “*little is much when God is in it.*”

Praise the Lord our God, and live worthy of your calling.

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**MAILBOX** (continued from page 1907)

It was good to meet you in Ohio. I am impressed with your work ... – **MI**

Now that I know you and have met you and have heard you speak, I have the utmost respect for you and your efforts on behalf of the truth. **YOU ARE THE REAL DEAL.** The truths you know have come through trial. You cannot speak as powerfully of the grace of God as you do without having gone through trial and tasted of Christ, both of the joyous and of the sorrowful. There is only one school of training for what we do, and it is the school of Christ. No man can teach it. No man can find the perfect combination of scholarship and humility and testedness by fire. You qualify, my brother, and it is so good to be a fellow laborer in the evangel with you. – **OH**

All the goodies the last few weeks have really ministered to me especially. I appreciate your labor in the Word to bring us these insights. Thank you for the little “*balm of Gilead*” to start my day. – **NC**

I hope that you are well aware that I love and appreciate you for your testimony to the truth and love in Jesus Christ. I feel a kindred spirit with you and pray God will bless you in His service. – **IN**

Thanks for the *Daily Email Goodies*. At first I thought I was just going to get more stuff that I would not find the time to read, but I have found that yours are short and sweet, and so I take the little time required to read them. They are interesting, instructive and faith building. – **Canada**

How ironic this one came today [Daily Email Goodie #2069] ... after my Mom’s pastor egged me all morning when he came to pick her up to “GO to Church!” I just gave him Wayne Jacobson’s article *Why I Don’t Go To Church Anymore* and smiled – although his words stung a bit. Being a Primitive Baptist Pastor’s daughter has its “respectable roots,” but it is nothing compared to the Joy of knowing Him personally! Thanks for your words of wisdom. They are always uplifting and reflective. – **TX**

# Love

by – Daniel Russino

It is obvious there are many different sects dividing the Body of Christ. Much difficulty arises because each one has their own views when interpreting the Scriptures. This in turn brings disagreement among ourselves.



How are we to act in this situation? Should we take our brothers and sisters in the Lord by the shoulders and shake them until they adhere to our views? May it not be coming to that!

The apostle Paul gives us guidance. He urges us to become imitators of God as beloved children, and to walk in love according as Christ also loves us. With all humility, meekness and patience, we must bear with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit with the tie of peace. There is one body and one spirit, according as we were called also with one expectation of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 5:1,2; 4:1-6).

Every true believer needs the quality of Paul's message in their lives. We must walk and bear with one another in love and keep the unity of the spirit with the tie of peace, not break it. We should keep God's unity, not make a unity. With this in

PAUL (continued from page 1903)

It was needful that some of these things be taken up in his early epistles.

The whole picture changed after Acts 28:28: no more sending handkerchiefs to heal; one brother is sick nigh unto death; Paul had to leave another "at Miletum sick" (II Timothy 4:20), and he could only prescribe a certain tonic for Timothy's sick stomach (I Timothy 5:23).

Yet only the things that were distinctly church revelations in the Pre-prison Epistles continue

mind, our relationship with other members of the body of Christ will be gracious, not irritating. This is vital especially when presenting our views of the truth. In the second letter of Paul to Timothy, there are even more details pertaining to what our attitude should be towards other true believers. Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with all who are invoking the Lord out of a clean heart (II Timothy 2:22).

Regardless of what truth we hold dear to our hearts and how much it repels others, we must look at the bottom line which is the motive. We should not be angry, but fellowship with all who call upon the Lord out of a clean heart. Behavior shows those who take the name of Christ. As your brother in the Lord, I pray this is your attitude towards the author. The purpose of this is not to attack or poke fun at one's beliefs, or give an impression of superiority. Neither is it based on a man-made unity. The moment man makes a unity, he breaks the one which God has made. The result would only lead to another sect.

*God's Truths Recovered*  
1992, Appendix

on. Healings, tongues and other miracles, for instance, were not Pauline revelations, nor was water baptism. All of these things began before Paul came on the scene, and they are related to Israel and the coming earthly Kingdom.

On the other hand, the things that are distinct church truths, and not brought in until the Spirit revealed them through Paul, these things all continue on into the Prison Epistles; but other things did change, and Acts 28:28 was the big turning point.



## Our Mailbox

Your heart of service and work is truly appreciated; whether the world recognizes it or not, the body of Christ is thankful!! – **TN**

The *Daily Email Goodies* are great stuff! I sure am enjoying the *BSN*, and am sharing some of it with my friends here. We're all pondering the Love of God towards us and are SO enjoying learning more of it! Thank you for your interesting insights, and your loving style of sharing it. It is amazing how timely it always is for what we are going through and contemplating ourselves – and always gives much insight to it all ...

Anyway, just wanted to let you know we're still enjoying your writings and passing the word along ... BTW, I especially liked your letter “Dear Saints” in *BSN* #190 that God is always teaching you more – that was neat to read. Guess I admire those who remain humble enough to admit they do not have all the answers, but truly enjoy learning from wherever or whomever God chooses to bring His Good News! God is so neat to be able to use ANYTHING in His creation, or even man's, to teach us of Himself – if we have ears to hear. The focus is Christ, and nothing – or no one – else! – **TX**

Thank you for how you have blessed my life everyday. – **AL**

Have had a lot going on here the past few days ... We are all heartbroken ... This I do know, that the same God that held us all in His hands yesterday (before this season of sadness) is the same God that holds us in His hands today. I can trust Him and that I do. It still feels like my insides are being torn out though. So please pray.

Thank you for your *labor of love* in the *Goodies* and *Notebook*; they've prepared us for our battle ahead. – **NC**

It was a pleasure meeting you and your sons at the fellowship in Youngwood. My wife Sandy and I had a wonderful time. Thank you for your powerful teachings. We'll cherish the memories, laughter and tears. – **PA**

I am enjoying these *Daily Email Goodies* very much and am sharing them with others who are also enjoying them. – **NY**

Thank you for your humble spirit, your love, and the energy of your conviction and dedication to God's service. – **OH**

The newest *BSN* number 194 is a very good teaching study! Keep up the good work. I am really enjoying the *BSN* each week. – **MI**

You are sending out some “heavy” stuff. Concepts that I believe in and take for granted. Concepts that I wish others in my family and friends believed and accepted as truth. I read “Israel's Great Commission” in the *Bible Student's Notebook*. Another great read of truth I came to understand with Ted McDivitt back in the early 80's. You and your sons are a blessing. Thanks for the time you put into your work. I may start forwarding your *Daily Email Goodies* to some friends. Thanks again. – **OH**

I thoroughly enjoy your *Daily Email Goodies* and have been passing them along (in their entirety) to a few friends and family. Thanks for all you do! – **TX**

Excellent *Daily Email Goodie*. The divine vs human perspective causes just as much confusion for people as the difference in administrations. – **PA**

(see **MAILBOX**, page 1905)

# The Feasts of the Lord (Leviticus 23)

*A Prophetic Picture of Israel's Future Redemption*

