



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

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

Volume XIV
Issue 346

Paul's Post-Acts Ministry

by — R.B. Shiflet

May we never lose sight of the precious truth that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is for us. Wherever we read, we find pictures of Christ and profitable contemplation.

Most believers in right division of the Word recognize, however, that the epistles of the Apostle Paul have a special place in our study, for Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. When we follow this truth a bit further, we can surely see that while all of his epistles are important for us, his seven early epistles, written during the Acts period, were written during the time that he was still going to the Jew first (cf. Romans 1:16-17), performing miracles of healing, raising the dead, speaking with tongues, observing Jewish days and ceremonies – even offering sacrifices, or being willing to do so – and the letters he wrote during that period of his ministry reflect these things.

When we come to the seven epistles he wrote *after* the close of the book of Acts, however, we reach the pinnacle of God's revelation concerning the church which is the Body of Christ. We find the *full* revelation of truth that concerns us – the truth of the mystery, kept secret in other ages, but made known to and through the Apostle Paul.

I like to meditate upon these seven epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus and Philemon) and try to find the one word, or the particular truth that the epistle brings to me. This, of course, is in addition to serious, detailed, word by word study of the epistles that is necessary and profitable.



EPHESIANS The Epistle of Grace

What is the key word or key message of Ephesians? There are differences of opinion, of course.

Norman B. Harrison, in his fine little devotional commentary on the book of Ephesians, builds his outline around the three-fold nature of the truths revealed in the book; he lists "seven significant words" that he feels are key words, namely: "grace," "spiritual," "heavenlies," "mystery," "body," "walk," and "in."

W.B. Riley, in his *Bible of the Expositor and Evangelist*, Volume 12, on Ephesians, builds his commentary on the threefold teaching of the book, but his approach is different from that of Dr. Harrison.

Charles Welch, of London, in his excellent book, *The Testimony of the Lord's Prisoner*, shows the *twofold* division of the book, three doctrinal chapters and three practical chapters, each section balancing the other, and turning on the pivot word "worthy" of Ephesians 4:1.

These books are all helpful for study purposes, *but* I think if I was to select the one word that Ephesians brings to me, it would be the word "grace."

From the salutation (1:2) to the benediction (6:24) we are confronted with the grace of God. Our acceptance

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic 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 law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (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 freedom from 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).

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Strictly Personal

BULLINGER BIOGRAPHY

In the 1980s Juanita Carey did extensive research into the life of E.W. Bullinger. This included a three-year trip to England to find out more about the man that seemed to have been forgotten.

We are very grateful that Father put this enormous work into her heart so that we could have a wonderful glimpse into the life of this outstanding student of Scriptures. What a treasure her work is.

After being out of print for the past few years, we are excited to announce that she has given us permission to reprint his biography.

Watch for an announcement of its completion in the pages of the *BSN*.

THE NAKED TRUTH

I am often reminded that many years ago, when I just started teaching the Scriptures, I had a dear elderly lady tell me that all she just wanted was “the naked truth.”

She didn’t want the truth “dressed up” in any way; she just wanted it straight, simple and plain. That should be the grand goal of every Bible teacher: the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth – clear and simple. That is my heart’s desire for the *BSN*.

Ever your brother,

Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

PAUL (continued from front page)

in the Beloved is to the “*praise of the glory of His grace*” (1:6); our position is possible because of “*the riches of His grace*” (1:7); our salvation itself, in its every facet, is “*by grace*” (2:5, 8); in the ages to come, He will, through our salvation, show “*the exceeding riches of His grace*” (2:7). This epistle reveals, in all of its fullness and profundity, the truth concerning the “*dispensation of grace*” (3:2, 7-8). The same grace that saves us enables us to serve the Lord (4:7, 29).

Truly, Ephesians is the “*grace*” epistle, and those of us who love the gospel of the grace of God and the truth of the mystery should search and ponder this epistle frequently.

PHILIPPIANS The Epistle of Joy

When we open the book of Philippians, we find the word “*grace*,” our “*Ephesian*” word, in the salutation (1:2), the benediction (4:23), and in only one other place (1:7), where the Apostle speaks of his own grace.

In Philippians the key note is “*joy*” and “*rejoicing*.” These two words occur a total of 14 times in the four

chapters in the original language (in addition to these, there are several other words translated “*joy*” and “*rejoicing*” in the epistle).

Interestingly enough, the words we are to consider are very closely kin to the word “*grace*” in the Greek. The word for “*grace*” is *charis* (or *karis*), while the words for “*joy*” and “*rejoicing*” are *chara* and *chairo*.

Obviously, apart from the grace of Ephesians there cannot be the rejoicing of Philippians.

I learn from Philippians that I am to pray with joy (1:4); that there is joy associated with faith (1:25); that harmony among believers brings joy to spiritual leaders (2:3); that the Lord’s servants who minister faithfully to the church are to be received with joy (gladness) (2:29). I learn that those who are won to Christ when we give forth the Word are our “*joy and crown*” (4:1). The fact is impressed on me that joy is a means of fellowship, for I read of the mutual joy and rejoicing of the Apostle with the Philippians (2:17-18, 28). I am taught that, when Christ is truly preached, regardless of the circumstances, I am to rejoice (1:18). Above all, I learn that true joy and rejoicing come only as we rejoice in the Lord (3:1; 4:4, 10). I am especially reminded of my failure to ►



rejoice when I am reminded that these words on “joy” and “rejoicing” were penned from a Roman prison under the shadow of possible martyrdom for the cause of Christ (1:20-24).

COLOSSIANS

The Epistle of Knowledge

Even the casual student of the Bible is aware of the many striking parallels between Ephesians and Colossians. We are told that out of the 95 verses in Colossians, 78 have a marked resemblance to Ephesians. This is about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the book. Of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 78, or about half, are parallel to Colossians.

E.W. Bullinger, of England, and Robert Hadden, of the US, both have written about the differences in the way these truths are presented. They have shown that the truths are presented as *doctrine* in Ephesians and by way of *correction* in Colossians.

The central theme of the book, however, seems to be “knowledge.” The word that is used several times in the epistle means a precise, accurate knowledge; a thorough acquaintance with a true knowledge. It seems that the Apostle Paul used this word because he was dealing with the early arising of what came to be known as the Gnostic heresy, and the adherents of this heresy claimed to have special knowledge.

The Apostle tells the Colossians that he rejoices in their faith, hope and love, but he desires that they might be filled with the true knowledge of God’s will, in all

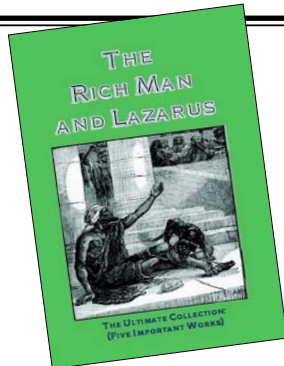
wisdom and spiritual understanding (Colossians 1:9). He prays that this knowledge might lead to a worthy walk which, in turn, will lead to an increase in this true knowledge (Colossians 1:10). He prays that they might possess a true knowledge of the mystery (Colossians 2:2, “*acknowledgment*”), which he had discussed at length in the Ephesian letter. In the practical section, he reminds his readers that they have put on the new man, having been renewed in full knowledge after the image of Him Who created him (Colossians 3:10).

There are other words translated “*know*” and “*knowledge*,” but these are predominant and give a summary of the epistle.

I TIMOTHY

The Epistle of Teaching

One cannot read the first epistle of Paul to Timothy without noticing that the word “*doctrine*” occurs eight times in the six chapters. The word “*doctrine*,” of course, means “teaching.” In addition, the verb “*to teach*” occurs three times in the letter. Another verb, meaning “*to teach otherwise*” or “*to teach any other doctrine*” is found twice. A noun meaning “*teachers of the law*” is found once, and there are kindred words translated “*learn*,” etc. This book, possibly more than any other, and certainly more than any of the other post-Acts epistles, stresses the value of sound teaching. Included are admonitions concerning the necessity for *sound* teaching. Equally important, the epistle stresses the harm that can come from *unsound* teaching – the doctrines of demons.



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II TIMOTHY

The Epistle of the Truth

In the last of his epistles, chronologically speaking, we find Paul the aged, knowing that he was ready to be offered for his testimony, deeply concerned with the way his fellow-members of the Body of Christ handled the truth.

Six times in the four brief chapters he mentions “truth.” The first reference is the golden text of dispensational teaching; it is the admonition to practice right division of the Word of Truth (2:15). Failure to follow this principle of Bible study is responsible for most of the “isms” that plague the church today. Legalism, antinomianism, liberalism, ceremonialism, and most of the other “isms” can be traced directly or indirectly to failure to practice right division.

By following a concordance and noting the other occurrences of the word “truth” in this epistle we are able to trace the following progressive steps.

Those who fail to practice rightly dividing the Word of Truth usually, sooner or later, note that:

1. Concerning the truth they have “erred”; the word means “to swerve aside” (2:18).
2. We are to pray that such might turn to God in repentance and acknowledge the truth (2:25).
3. Such are ever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth (3:7).
4. As they continue their rebellious degeneration they begin to resist the truth (3:8).
5. In its final stages, those who have followed this path turn away their ears from the truth (4:4).

May this timely epistle remind us of the need for knowing the truth, and rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

TITUS

The Epistle of Good Works

The little epistle to Titus stresses the “good works” that result from the salvation that comes to us by grace. In 1:16 he shows that, regardless of our verbal testimony, unless we practice the good works in which God has before ordained that we should walk (Ephesians 2: 10),

our works will deny God. In 2:7, we are taught to be a pattern of good works to others, while in 2:14 we are urged to be zealous of good works. The admonition in 3:1 is to be ready for every good work, while in 3:8 and 3:14 we are told to be careful to maintain good works. Many who like to refer to themselves as “grace” believers might well spend some time with this little epistle that shows so clearly that the grace that saves us also teaches us to live lives of good works (2:11-13).

PHILEMON

The Picture of Imputation

There are many ways to look at this brief epistle. Valuable insights come through a study of the names of the characters in the interesting story told by the letter; but more than anything else, I find in this epistle the picture of imputation – Christ imputing His righteousness to us.

Onesimus, a runaway slave, had traveled to Rome where he met the Apostle Paul. There, he came to know Christ as his Savior. The letter was written to his master, Philemon, who was a friend of Paul, for Onesimus to take back to his master. In the letter, Paul makes the appeal of Philemon concerning this slave,

*If thou count me a partner, receive him as myself.
If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put
that on mine account; I Paul have written it with
mine own hand, I will repay it (:17-19).*

This is such a precious picture of the work of our Lord Jesus in our behalf. We, as spiritual outcasts, through the grace of God receive the very righteousness of Christ; He can say to His Father, “If he has wronged You, or owes You anything, put that on My account; whatever love You have for Me, put it on his account.”

How we should rejoice in the work of our Lord that is portrayed here!

May you, the reader, find these epistles more meaningful after thinking about them along these lines. Better still, why not study them diligently and make your own summary?



Taking Cheerful Views

by — J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

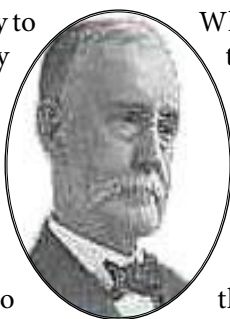
A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken. ... He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast (Proverbs 15:13, 15).

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).

One of the secrets of a happy life is the ability to extract *comfort* and *sweetness* from every circumstance. Multitudes prefer to nurse misery than to cherish joy. They always find the *dark side* of everything, if there is a dark side to be found. They appear to be conscientious grumblers, as if it was their duty to extract some *essence of misery* from every circumstance. The *weather* is either too cold or too hot; too wet or too dry. They never find anything to their taste. Nothing escapes their criticism. They find fault with the *food* on the table, with the *bed* in which they lie, with the *government* and its officials, with merchant and workman – in a word, with the world at large and in detail.

They are *chronic grumblers*. Instead of being content in the state in which they are, they have learned to be discontented, no matter how happy their lot! If they had been placed in the Garden of Eden they would have discovered something with which to find fault! Their *wretched habit* empties life of all possible joy and turns every *cup* to bitter gall.

On the other hand, there are rare people who always look at the bright side. They find some joy and beauty everywhere. If the sky is covered with clouds they will point out to you the splendor of some great cloud-bank piled up like mountains of glory. When the storm rages, instead of fears and complaints, they find an exquisite pleasure in contemplating its grandeur and majesty. In the most faulty picture they see some bit of beauty which charms them. In the most disagreeable person they discover some kindly trait or some bud of promise. In the most disheartening circumstances, they find something for which to be thankful, some gleam of cheer breaking in through the thick gloom.



When a ray of sunlight streamed through a crack in the shutter, and made a bright patch on the floor in the darkened room – the little dog rose from his dark corner, and went and lay down in the one sunny spot; and these cheerful people live in the same way. If there is one beam of cheer or hope anywhere in their lot – they will find it! They have a genius for happiness. They always make the best out of circumstances. They are happy as *travelers*. They are contented as *boarders*. Their good nature never fails. They take a cheerful view of every perplexity. Even in sorrow, their faces are illumined, and *songs* come from the chambers where they weep. Such people have a wondrous ministry in this world. They are like apple trees when covered with blossoms, pouring a sweet fragrance all around them.

Some people are born with sunny dispositions, with large hopefulness and joyfulness, and with eyes for the bright side of life. Others are naturally disposed to gloom. *Physical causes* have, no doubt, much to do with the discontent of many lives. Yet, while there is this predisposition in temperament on the one hand toward hopefulness, and on the other toward depression and gloom, it is still largely a matter of *culture* and *habit*, for which we are individually responsible. Like the apostle Paul, we can learn to take cheerful views of life, and to extract contentment and enjoyment from any circumstances.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again – Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).

This clearly is a most important part of the Christian life. Fretfulness grieves God. It tells of unbelief. It destroys the soul's peace. It disfigures the beauty of Christian character. It not only makes us soured and unhappy in our own



hearts, but its influence on others is bad. We have no right to project the gloom of our discontent over any other life. Our attitude is to be ever toward joy. There is nothing so depressing in its effect on others as morbidness!

Also, for the sake of those among whom we live, and on whose lives we unconsciously are either *casting shadows* or *pouring sunshine*, we should seek to learn *contentment*.

ELEMENTS OF THIS DIVINE LIVING

One is patient submission to all of the ills and hardships of life, which are unavoidable. No person's lot is perfect. No mortal ever yet found a set of circumstances without some unpleasant feature. Sometimes it is in our power to modify the discomforts. Our trouble is often of our own making! Much of it needs only a little energetic activity on our part, to remove it. We are fools, if we live on amid ills and hardships, which a reasonable industry would change to comforts, or even pleasures!

ACCEPTING UNAVOIDABLE PROBLEMS

However, if there are *unavoidable* ills or burdens, which we cannot by any energy of our own remove or lighten, we must learn to be reconciled to them without murmuring. We have a saying that, "What cannot be *cured*, must be *endured*"; but the very phrasing tells of an *unyielding* heart! There is submission to the inevitable, but no reconciliation to it!

True contentment is not irritated under disappointments and losses, but *accepts* them, becomes *reconciled* to them, and at once looks about to find something good in them. This is the secret of happy living! When we come to think of it, how *senseless* it is to struggle against the inevitable! Discontent helps nothing. It never removes a hardship, or makes a burden any lighter, or brings back a vanished pleasure. One never feels better for complaining; it only makes him more miserable!

RECOGNIZING UNATTAINABLE DREAMS

We would also get far along toward contentment if we ceased to waste time dreaming over unattainable earthly good. Only a few people can be great or rich; the mass must always remain in ordinary circumstances. Suppose that each of the people in the world, were *millionaires*; who could be found to do the work that must be done? Or, suppose that all were *great poets*. Imagine all of the people in the world, all writing poetry! Who would write the prose? A little serious reflection will show that the world needs only a very few great and conspicuous lives,

while it needs the rest for its varied industries, its plain duties, its hard toil.

ENVY AND COVETING

Also, a large amount of our discontent arises from our *envy* of those who have what we have not. There are many who lose all of the comfort of their own lives in *coveting* the better things that some other one possesses! How foolish!

There are several considerations which ought to modify this miserable feeling of *envy*, which brings so much bitterness. If we could know *the secret history of the life that we envy* for its splendor and prosperity, perhaps we would not exchange for it our lowlier life, with its plain circumstances. Certain it is that contentment is not so apt to dwell in *palaces* or on *thrones*, as in the homes of the humble. The *tall peaks* rise nearer the skies, but the winds smite them more fiercely!

RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF OUR PLACE

Then why should I hide my *one talent* in the earth, because it is not *ten*? Why should I make my life a failure in the place allotted to me, while I sit down and dream over *unattainable things*? Why should I miss *my one golden opportunity* – however small – while I envy some other one what *seems* his greater opportunity? Countless people make themselves wretched by vainly trying to grasp far-away joys, while they leave untouched and despised the numberless little joys and bright bits of happiness, which lie close to their hand.

As one has written, "Stretching out his hand to catch the *stars*, man forgets the *flowers* at his feet – so beautiful, so fragrant, so multitudinous and so various." The secret of happiness lies in *extracting pleasure from the things we have* while we enter no mad, vain chase after *impossible dreams*!

A DISORDERED IMAGINATION

Another way to learn cheerful views of life is resolutely to refuse to be *frightened at shadows*, or even to see *trouble* where there is none. Half or more of the things that most worry us have no existence but in a *disordered imagination*. Many things that in the dim distance look like *shapes of peril*, when we draw near to them melt into harmless shadows, or even change into forms of friendliness!

Much of the gloomy tinge that many people see on ►



everything is caused by the color of the glasses through which they look. We look out through our blue glasses, and then wonder what makes everything blue! The greater part of our discontent is caused by some *imaginary trouble* which never really comes.

MAKING THE BEST OF THINGS

We also need to learn always to *make the best of things*. There will always be *cloudy* days. No one can live without meeting discomforts, disappointments and hardships. No wisdom, no industry of ours can eliminate from our experience all that is disagreeable or painful. Shall we allow the *one discordant note in the grand symphony* to mar for us all of the noble music? Shall we permit the *one discomfort in our home* to cast a cloud over all of its pleasures and embitter all of its joys? Shall we not seek for the bright side? There really is *sunshine* enough in the *darkest* day to make any ordinary mortal happy, if he only has eyes to see it!

GOD IS WORKING ALL FOR GOOD

There is no *lot in life* so dreary that it has not at least its one little patch of beauty, or its one wee flower looking up out of the dreariness, like a smile of God. Even if the natural eye can see no *brightness in the cloud*, by faith the child of God knows that there is good in everything. There are reasons, no doubt, why no *perfect happiness* can be found in this world. If there were no *thorns in our pillow* here on earth, would we care to pillow our heads on the bosom of Divine love? Our Father makes our *nest rough* to drive us to seek the warmer, softer nest, prepared for us in His Own love.

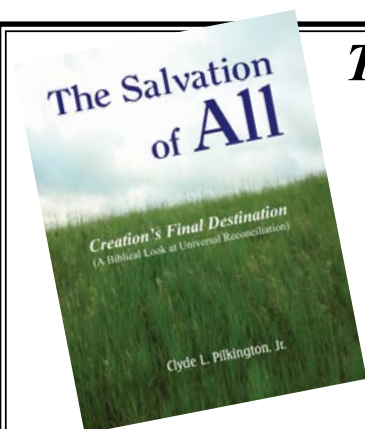
We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God; to those who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

To each one in Christ there is a promise of *good* out of all things. There is a *wondrous chemistry* in the *Divine providence* which, out of the combining of *life's strange elements*, always produces blessing! Thus *faith's eyes* see *good* in all things, however dark they may appear! Faith in God's love and care to us enables us to take a cheerful view of any experience.

MATURITY'S CONTENTMENT

The more the heart becomes engaged with God, and its affections enchained about him, the less it is disturbed by the *little roughnesses and hardships* of earth. Things that fret *childhood* have no power to break the peace of *manhood*. As we grow into higher spiritual manhood and become more and more filled with Christ, we shall rise above the power of *earth's discontents*! We shall be happy even amid *trials* and *losses*, amid *discomforts* and *disappointments*, because our life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3), and we have *food to eat* of which the world knows not!

The lesson of contentment will bring some new pleasure into every moment. It will *paint beauty* for us on the dreariest desert. It will *plant flowers* for us along every step of the rugged road. It will bring *music* for us out of every sighing wind and wailing storm. It will fill the *darkest night* with star-beams! It will make us sunny-hearted, pleasing God, and blessing the world!



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