

THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

“...Since the New Testament epistles are directed to churches and individuals in the church, they most directly apply to us today. Most commands given in the epistles are general enough in nature that we need to obey them, or in the case of promises we can claim them. For example in 1 Corinthians 15 there is a promise given for immortal bodies and eventual victory over death. These promises are not just for those in the local Corinthian church but the universal church of God.” - Blue Letter Bible

- I. Know the Audience - The epistles were written to and for believers, not the lost
 - A. Examples of Salutations
 1. Ro. 1:7 - *“To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called [to be] saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*
 2. 1Co 1:2 - *“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called [to be] saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.”*
 3. 2Co 1:1 - *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy [our] brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:”*
 4. Gal 1:1-2 - *“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) 2 And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:”*
 5. Eph 1:1 - *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:”*
 - B. In the introductions of all but one of the remaining NT epistles (Hebrews) individual believers or groups of believers are designated as the intended recipients of the letters
 - C. These letters were being written to the Church, an entity distinct from the nation of Israel and the world
 1. 1Co 10:32 - *“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:”*
 2. Jo. 15:19 - *“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”*
 - D. While many times local churches are designated as the recipients the contents of the letters are typically applicable to all believers in Christ
 1. 1 Co 12:13 - *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”*
 2. Eph 4:11-13 - *“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”*
 - E. Why is this so important to understand?
- II. “In Christ” Truth - It’s Everywhere
 - A. There are approximately 220 references to “In Christ” truth in New Testament - using “in”, “into”, “together with”
 - B. Jesus introduced “In Christ” truth to the 11 in the Upper Room

1. Jo 14:20 - *“At that day ye shall know that I [am] in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”*
 2. Jo 15:4-5 - *“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye [are] the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”*
 3. “In Christ” truth serves as the basis for believers doing anything of eternal value while in this life
- C. “In Christ” truth provides all believers with a Position and Possessions
1. “At the point of salvation God the Holy Spirit accomplishes a work which only God could do. He takes a depraved man who has responded to the gospel with faith and places that one in a new sphere, into a new standing before God -- "In Christ". This is how Christian believers serving on earth can be seen by God in the heavenlies, seated at the Father's right hand "in Christ". They are united with Christ by Spirit baptism into a reckoned position in heaven. This is achieved by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. Such an one in Christ is then counted to possess the identical righteousness of Jesus Christ. He together with all Christian saints is seen in Christ at the right hand of the Father totally free of sin.” - Orin Bidwell
 2. Position - How God the Father views the believer now that they have been placed in Christ
 - a) Dead with Christ in His Death as Our Perfect Substitute - Ro 6:10-11; Gal 2:20
 - b) Resurrected with Christ - Col 3:1,2; 2:12; Ro 6:4, 11
 - c) No Condemnation in Christ Jesus - Ro 8:1
 - d) Accepted in the Beloved - Eph 1:6
 - e) Made Near to God - Eph 2:13
 - f) Seated in the Heavenlies - Eph 2:6
 - g) Made the Fulness - Col 2:9, 10; Jo 17:20-24 - absolutely complete with all others in the Body of Christ
 - h) Share in the New Creation - 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10
 - i) Put on Christ as an Outer Garment - Gal 3:27
 - j) Made One with Christ and One Another - Jo 17:21-24; Ro 12:4, 5; 1 Cor 12:18, 25
 - k) Made Saints in Christ - Phil 1:1; 4:21
 3. Possessions - “what the believer has in Christ last this point in time to used to the glory of God”
 - a) All Spiritual Blessings in the Heavenlies - Eph 1:3
 - b) Placed as a Priest - 1 Pe 2:4, 5, 9
 - c) Posses the Righteousness of God - 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9
 - d) Possess Positional Sanctification - 1 Cor 1:2, 30
 - e) Possess Complete Redemption - 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7; Ro 3:24
 - f) Placed as a Mature Son - Gal 3:26-28
 - g) Provided with a Spiritual Gift - 1 Cor 12:13, 18, 25, 28
 - h) Placed as Having Liberty in Christ - Ro 8:2; Gal 2:4
 - i) Placed as One Inlawed to Christ - 1 Cor 9:21
 - j) Part of the Building of God - Eph 2:21, 22
 - k) Provided Forgiveness by God - Eph 4:32; Col. 1:14
 - l) Christ Calls us Brethren - Heb. 2:11

III. Don't Skip the "Good Stuff"

- A. Abiding in Christ serves as the basis for living the Christian life and any worthwhile service to God
- B. One must understand the basis and proper motivation for acceptable service to God
 - 1. The Old Testament Law was very specific, focused on the "acceptable" action in hundreds of different situations - covering sacrifices, clothing, menu, hygiene, religious worship, etc
 - 2. New Testament revelation to the Church emphasizes appreciation of salvation, proper perspective, right attitudes
- C. There can be a tendency to want to skip the basis and proper motivation for our service to get to the Christian "To Do" list
 - 1. Romans - "practical" instructions don't begin until chapter 12
 - 2. Ephesians - "practical" instructions don't begin until after the instructions to "allow yourself to be filled with the Spirit" in chapter 5
 - 3. Why is this so important?
- D. Pay Particular Attention to the Words, "For", "Therefore", and "But"
 - 1. Important "But now" Passages - *de nuni* - at this very moment
 - a) Rom 6:22 - "*but now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*"
 - b) Rom 7:6 - "*But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not [in] the oldness of the letter.*"
 - c) Eph 2:13 - "*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*"
 - d) Col 1:26 - "*[Even] the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.*"
 - 2. Important "therefore" Passages - *oun* - "therefore, accordingly, consequently, these things being so"
 - a) Rom 5:1 - "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"
 - b) Rom 12:1 - "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, [which is] your reasonable service.*"
 - c) 2Co 5:17 - "*Therefore if any man [be] in Christ, [he is] a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*"
 - d) Gal 5:1 - "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*"
 - e) Heb 4:16 - "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*"
 - 3. Important "for" Passages - *hoti* - can mean that (for the purpose of), or because (from which something results)
 - a) 1Co 2:14 - "*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.*"
 - b) Phl 3:20 - "*For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*"
 - c) 1Th 5:9 - "*For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,*"

- d) Heb 7:19 - *“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope [did]; by the which we draw nigh unto God.”*
- e) 1Pe 5:5 - *“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all [of you] be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”*

IV. God has Provided Everything We Need to Live the Christian Life

A. It may seem impossible but it is because He has promised

- 1. 2Pe 1:3-4 - *“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that [pertain] unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”*

B. Know that God has uniquely enabled believers in Christ to “work out their own salvation”

- 1. *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* - Col 1:27
- 2. *“...and this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.”* - 1 Jo 5:10-12

V. Operate by Faith

A. The New Testament truths and promises by which all believers in Christ are to live by can sound fantastical - doesn't much of the Old Testament sound fantastical in its own right?

B. The New Testament stresses the importance of faith upon God and what He has promised to the believer in Christ

- 1. “Faith” in the NT - John (1); Paul (139); General Epistles (58)
- 2. “Believe” in the NT - John (3); Paul (30); General Epistles (9)
- 3. “Believeth” in the NT - John (3); Paul (14); General Epistles (6)

C. Believers are instructed to order their lives by faith and not by sight

- 1. 2 Cor 5:7 - *“We walk by faith and not by sight”*
- 2. Heb 11:6 - *“It is impossible to please Him without faith”*

D. Examples of promises to be accepted by faith

- 1. Position in Christ
- 2. Christ in Us
- 3. Logically consider yourself dead to the Sin Nature
- 4. We have been made alive to God
- 5. We can have confident access to God
- 6. Walking in the Spirit
- 7. Put on the whole Armor of God
- 8. Future Glorified Body