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Godliness. Reverence. Obedience. Worship.



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growth in faith and service to God



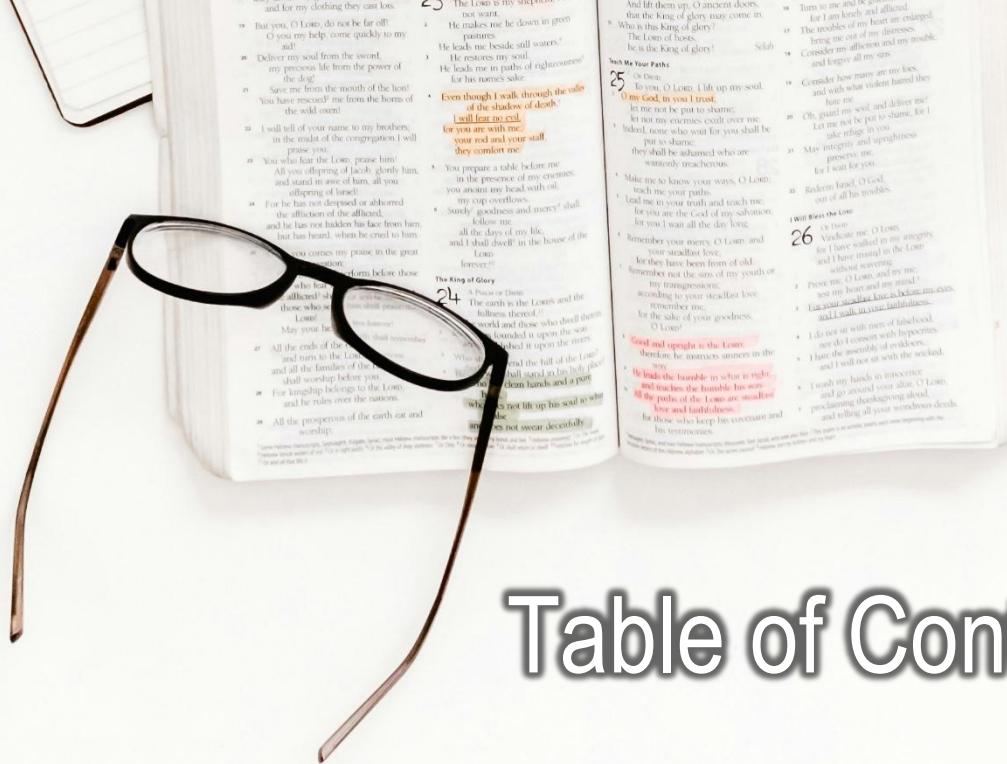


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From the Editor...

Five months before his death, Benjamin Franklin wrote a private letter to French scientist Jean-Baptiste LeRoy. In it, he wrote:

Our new Constitution is now established, everything seems to promise it will be durable; but, in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes.

- constitutioncenter.org

There are all kinds of taxes: sales tax, property tax, luxury tax, tourist tax, vice tax, and of course, income tax (due for most in Canada & the USA in April). In fact, there is even an estate tax (basically a tax on dying). Franklin was right, death and taxes, and even the combination of the two, are inevitable.

In Matthew 17, some asked Peter, "Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?" Uncertain, but not wanting to stir trouble, Peter said, "Yes." Later, when the apostle went to Jesus, the Lord anticipated his question, asked him, "From whom do kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?" Peter rightly answered, "From strangers," which

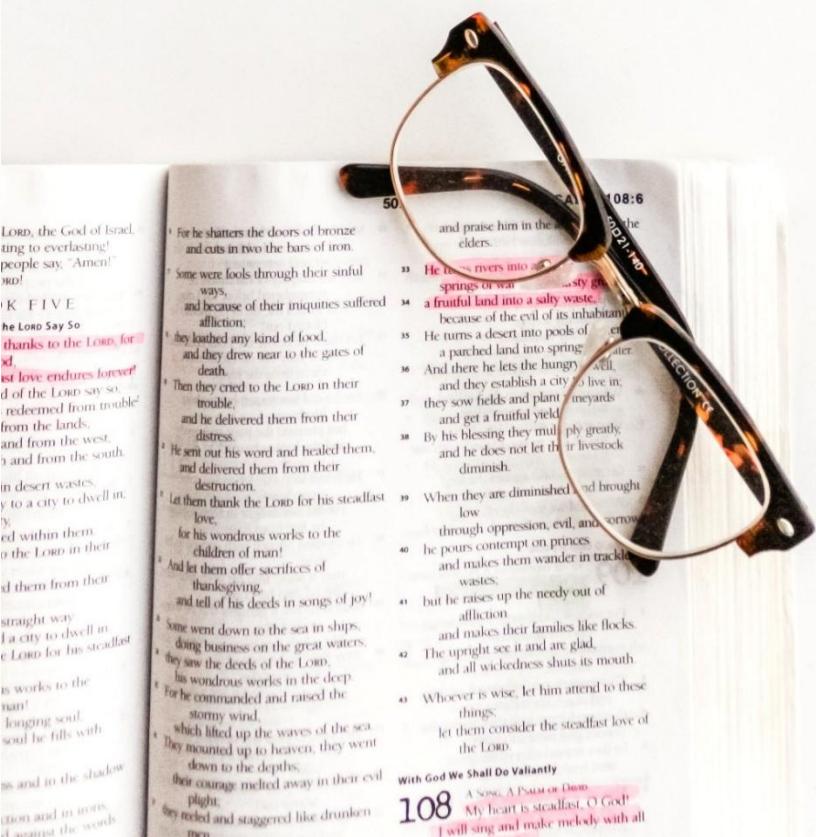


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means "the sons are free." There was no need for Jesus to pay a tax to the temple, His Father's house. And yet, "lest we offend them," Jesus paid the tax.

Friends, in this life, we are not exempt from death or taxes. But what a blessing to know that if we are faithful until death we will receive a crown of life (Revelation 2:10). In eternity, through Jesus Christ, you and I, the sons and daughters of the king, will be free!

Thank you for your interest in GROW magazine. If you benefit from it, pass it on. Share a link on social media, print the articles out, share the notification email or a PDF copy of GROW. I appreciate our writers and their diligent effort to produce helpful and encouraging material for this issue. May we always seek to dig deeper and grow stronger in God's word.



Now, let's GROW together!

William Stewart
editor & designer

The Hall of Faith: Barak

CHADWICK BREWER | HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Much head-scratching and possibly some bald spots have resulted from the last few names mentioned in Hebrews 11. How much we wish that time had not failed the Hebrew writer so that he could have more fully explained their inclusion in this list! The names can be jarring and seemingly out of place, including some men that we would have never placed on the list of those of faith.

Perhaps it is for this precise reason that they are included in this list by the Holy Spirit. I will not claim to know all, most, or even some of the answers to our queries. But perhaps, by careful examination, we might come to a deeper understanding.

Barak, from Judges 4, seems like a man destined to end up on a list of men without faith. The first time his name is mentioned, it is in a reprimand by Deborah. She refers to a previous (unrecorded) summons by God for Barak to gather the men at Mount Tabor, calling out 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun to go out against Sisera. Seemingly, this is a summons that was ignored.

The next time his name is mentioned, he agrees to obey God's command if and only if Deborah goes with him. We might be willing to give Barak the benefit of the doubt, since Deborah was the judge, and judges were the ones who seemed to lead the offensive against the enemy. But there is an immediate rebuke, with God promising to give the glory of the victory not to him, but to a woman.

When we look at this, we might ask, "Faith? What faith?" And yet, the Hebrew writer includes his name in the list of those who acted by faith. So let's look at four things from this

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text concerning Barak.

Barak's Hesitation vs. His Faithful Action

Barak is called by Deborah to lead Israel against Sisera, but he insists that she accompany him (Judges 4:8). While this might appear as a lack of faith, he still ultimately obeys God's command and leads the army to victory. His dependence on Deborah might reflect uncertainty, but not outright disbelief—he still trusts in God's word. It is much less faith and trust than God deserves, but it is enough faith to lead him to action.

We will probably hesitate when doors of opportunity are set before us. We might even insist that we cannot walk into challenging situations until there is someone by our side to share those fears and uncertainties with. While this is less than ideal, it is something that God can work with. Don't count yourself out if you hesitate. Keep working to have your faith grow and abound.

Faith in God's Victory, Not His Own

Unlike some of the other judges, Barak does not seek personal glory. Deborah prophesies that the

honor of killing Sisera will go to a woman (Judges 4:9), yet Barak does not refuse to fight. His willingness to move forward, even without being the one to claim the final victory, demonstrates humility.

For many today, the thought of earthly glory remains a motivating force in our acts of righteousness. This is the impetus behind Jesus's warning in Matthew 6:1, where He tells us to beware of doing our deeds to be seen by others. He goes further to address the insidious desire we have for our hidden deeds to become quietly known or even to praise ourselves for them. This is why we are not to let our right hand know what our left hand is doing. We must stamp out this desire for glory-seeking. Barak, however, is willing to act even after he knows there is no glory in it for him – possibly even dishonor, as has been handed down for centuries.

Hebrews 11 Highlights Acts of Faith, Not Perfection

The individuals in Hebrews 11 were not flawless. Gideon doubted, Samson was reckless, and David sinned grievously. Moses had a pretty treacherous false start that ended in murder. Sarah originally laughed before finding faith. Abraham was clearly willing to deceive and to listen to Sarah's foolish idea of how God's plan was going to work. The list can go on, but what unites them is that they ultimately acted in faith. Barak, though hesitant at first, still led the charge and trusted God's promise.

We are not perfect people. We need to remember that Hebrews 11 is written by the Holy Spirit to us, in our imperfections, calling for us to take actions in faith. God knows our frame and remembers that we are but dust. He knows

that we have fallen short of His glory and that we have often put Him to open shame. Yet He is gracious and longsuffering, willing that ones such as us could become His workmanship. Barak helps bring this point home.

A Faith That Grew in Action

Judges 5 (the song of Deborah and Barak) portrays him as one who "led captives away" (Judges 5:12). His faith was not static. He stepped forward despite his reservations and played a crucial role in delivering Israel. This is consistent with the entirety of Scripture. Faith can grow or it can fade. People are not who they are in a moment, but who they grow to be. Some have an explosion of faith that fades to nothing through neglect. Others have faith that grows by constant effort and attention.

The same holds true for us. If we have demonstrated remarkable faith in the past, that is no guarantee of continued faithfulness in the future. We are to be those who grow and increase in our faith. If we are among those who could be deemed "of little faith," we are not condemned to remain there. Remember that faith can be like a mustard seed that grows larger than any of the problems in the garden of our hearts. But for our faith to grow, we must act. Taking steps in faith helps us grow deeper in our faith.

Not much is said about Barak, and it might be foolishness to say too much, lest we talk confidently about things which we do not know. But suffice it to say, the Hebrew writer, and more importantly the Holy Spirit, deemed Barak worthy of our consideration while studying acting in faith. While I would love to imagine myself as Joseph, most likely I wouldn't even measure up to Barak. Thanks be to God for His lovingkindness to use one such as I!

Seven Churches of Asia: The Church at Ephesus

OSAMAGBE LESLEY EGHAREVBA | LAGOS, NIGERIA

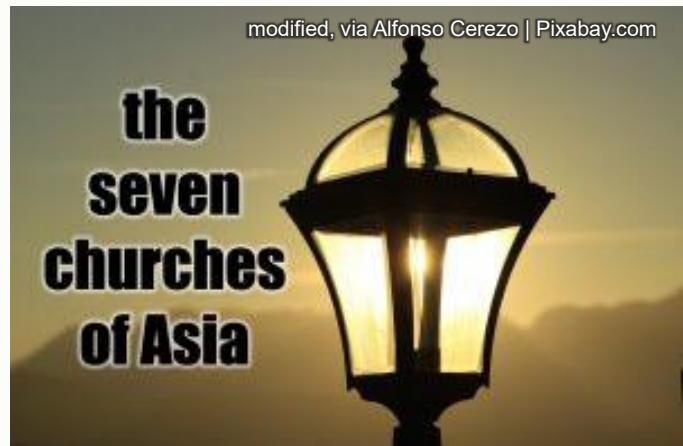
In the book of Revelation chapter 1, we read of the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. John said,

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." (Revelation 1:10–11)

Just as he was instructed, John wrote to each of these seven churches independently in chapters 2 and 3. This series will examine each of these churches and their messages identifying some unique features of this congregation and see how we can learn from them today and apply them to our congregations and personal lives.

Background of the Church in Ephesus

We read about the Lord's church in the city of Ephesus in three different New Testament books: Acts, Ephesians, and Revelation. Concerning the establishment of the Lord's church in the city of Ephesus, we read in Acts 18 that Paul first made a brief visit to the city with Aquila and Priscilla near the end of his second preaching trip. He left Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, and then journeyed on to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18-20). It was on this first visit to Ephesus in Acts 18 that Paul preached in the synagogue of the Jews but there is no mention of any conversions at that time (Acts 18:18-22). Later, Apollos came to preach there, and when he left Ephesus for Achaia, the brethren in Ephesus sent a letter on his behalf (Acts 18:27).



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While the existence of believers is noted in Ephesus, only Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned by name. This all happened before Paul returned to Ephesus and baptized about twelve men (Acts 19:1-7). Paul later returned to Ephesus in Acts 19 and stayed in the city and surrounding area for two years, during which he reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). As a result of his teachings, the word of God spread throughout all of Asia (Acts 19:10). Some time later after he had left, we see that Paul called the elders of this church to meet him in Miletus as he was traveling back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17). In Acts 20:18-28, we see that he issues to them a warning, that people will arise among themselves that will seek to draw some away from the church to follow after them.

A few years later, while Paul was imprisoned, he wrote his letter to the church in Ephesus. By then, the church appeared to be stable and strong. However, at the end of the letter, in chapter 6, he urges them to put on the whole armor of God. This gives us a glimpse of a growing church with elders, having matured and become exemplary. Later, Paul wrote two more epistles. In these letters, he writes to the young Timothy, instructing him to remain in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3).

Timothy was left there in order to correct some false teachings that had arisen by the time Paul wrote the letter of 1 Timothy. It seems that some of the concerns Paul had earlier raised were beginning to resurface within the church. In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul reminds Timothy to preach the word. And in 2 Timothy 4:3, he warns that a time will come when people will no longer endure sound doctrine.

In Revelation 2:2-6, the following is said about the church in Ephesus:

"I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

When we examine some basic facts about the church in Ephesus, there are a number of lessons for us to learn from her history and happenings.

The Church In Ephesus Hated Evil And Opposed False Doctrines

One reason why Timothy remained in Ephesus was to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine." This is because false doctrine is dangerous and will lead one to hell (2 John 9; Galatians 1:8-9). Jesus said that those teaching false doctrines are worshipping God in vain (Matthew 15:8-9). We are commanded to reject a heretic man after the first and second admonition (Titus 3:10). Paul told Timothy to "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which

you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." Indeed, the church in Ephesus was able to do this. Many churches today are complacent with false doctrine and this is very bad. A sound church must be willing to oppose errors and stand for the truth at all times. We saw the church in Antioch show very good example of this in Acts 15:1-3 when brethren from that church opposed the error that was taught by some other brethren from Judea concerning keeping the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Any church that would not oppose error cannot be pleasing to God. We must learn from the commendation of the church in Ephesus in this regard.

The Church In Ephesus Was A Working Church

Jesus said that the church in Ephesus "have labored for My name's sake" (Revelation 2:3) He also mentioned that He knows their "works and labor" (Verse 2). More than once, the idea of *laboring* is mentioned with regards to the church at Ephesus. Could this be said of the church that you are a member of? The local church has been saddled with the responsibility of laboring by preaching and teaching the Word of God as well as helping faithful members in need (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 5:16). The church in Thessalonica was a very good example of this in the area of evangelism (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8). And here, we see the church in Ephesus commended for laboring for Christ. This is something that every church must not joke about. How often does your church involve in evangelism in order to rescue the perishing? How much care do they have for those who are dying in sin? How much time do they devote to studying the Bible? How firm do they stand against false doctrines? These are marks of a sound church and faithful churches must emulate these in order to remain sound and faithful. Let us continue to labor for the Lord as individuals and as a church "knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1

Corinthians 15:58) and that “*God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name,*” (Hebrews 6:10). At least we saw that the Lord did not forget the labor of love that the Ephesians have shown. The Lord remembered their labor and He would remember yours too.

The Church In Ephesus Left Its First Love

While the church in Ephesus was commended, there was also an element of rebuke in the message. The church in Ephesus had abandoned its first love. Jesus said: “*Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love*” (Revelation 2:4). One may wonder why a church like Ephesus that had been blessed with sound teachers (like Paul, Apollos, Timothy, etc.) and elders (Acts 20:17) and have even existed for that long (over 40 years as at the time the letter of Revelation was written) could deviate and leave their first love. This is to tell us that the number of years that a congregation had existed does not matter when it comes to pleasing God. A “big” church with big

strength may deviate from the truth while a church with little strength (like Philadelphia – Revelation 3:8) may remain faithful even with their little strength. That is why it is important for those who think they are standing to take heed lest they fall (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Jesus urged the members of the Ephesian church, “*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works...*” (Revelation 2:5). The lesson here is that both individual believers and entire congregations can drift away from the faith (1 Timothy 4:1). We must always be vigilant, ready to work diligently to restore those who have lost their way (James 5:19-20).

Conclusion

The church in Ephesus started off well, with elders in place, faithful evangelists supporting them, and at least two inspired letters to guide and strengthen them. Yet, despite this strong foundation, they struggled and ultimately faded. Let us take this lesson to heart and learn from their history.

Christ, Our Passover

SHAWN CHANCELLOR | AMARILLO, TEXAS

Fear and helplessness This must have been what the average Israelite felt by the ninth plague. Nine times, Jehovah had struck the gods of Egypt. The intensity of the plagues had increased from annoying frogs and flies to decimated herds and crops. The people had been struck with boils, and hail had destroyed the fields. Despite the devastation, Pharaoh refused to submit, and he did not let the children of Israel go. However, God had one more plague in store, and this time, Pharaoh would relent.

The tenth and final plague was the death of the firstborn. In Exodus 11, Moses warned Pharaoh about this plague.

“Moses said, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well’” (Exodus 11:4–5 NASB).

In preparation for this plague, Israel was to sacrifice a lamb and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Exodus 12:3-10). They were to collect the lamb's blood in a basin, and using a bunch of hyssop, they were to put the blood on the doorpost and the lintels of their house. This lamb was sacrificed so that their firstborn would live.

“The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13, NASB95).



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On the night of the Passover, “the Lord struck all the firstborn of Egypt” (Exodus 12:29). “There was a great cry in Egypt, for there was no home where there was not someone dead” (Exodus 12:30). However, the Lord passed over the houses of Israel and spared their firstborn. As God had promised, Pharaoh ordered Israel to leave, and their bondage in Egypt was brought to an end.

This event was so significant in the history of Israel that it caused them to reorder their calendars, making the month of Nisan in which the Passover occurred the first month of the year (Exodus 12:2). The feast of Passover was to be observed every year followed by seven additional days in which there was to be no leaven in the house (Exodus 12:14-20). This feast was a reminder of God's deliverance of His people from bondage and death.

Christ our Passover

Several New Testament passages allude to a connection between the Passover Lamb and the sacrifice of Jesus. John makes this connection

when he records that like the Passover lamb, not one of Jesus's bones were broken (John 19:31-36; cf. Exodus 12:46). Peter states that we are redeemed "with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19). The Passover lamb was to be "unblemished." Its sacrifice was connected to the redemption of Israel from Egypt. However, the most direct connection is made by Paul, who states, "For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

These passages, especially 1 Corinthians 5:7, permit us to make typological connections between the Exodus Passover and the sacrifice of Jesus. Just as Israel was enslaved by a power that they could not overcome through their own strength or ingenuity, without Christ, we are incapable of freedom from the bondage to sin. Just as Pharaoh refused to allow Israel to go worship Jehovah (Exodus 5:1-2), sin prevents us from fellowship with God. Israel was delivered from slavery by grace (God's gracious act of redemption) through faith ("The sons of Israel went and did so; just as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron so they did" Exodus 12:28). Likewise, we are delivered from spiritual death by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The grace that saves us is found in the sacrifice of Jesus (Romans 3:24-26). The faith that saves is seen in our obedience to the Gospel (Romans 1:5; Romans 6:1-13; Colossians 2:12).

What does this mean for us?

As noted above, the Passover was followed by a seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:17-20). For seven days, there was to be no leaven found in the houses of Israel. The leaven was removed before the Passover meal (Exodus 12:14) and not brought back in until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Anyone who ate anything leavened during these seven days was to be "cut off

from Israel" (Exodus 12:16).

In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, Paul alludes to this practice. In this context, leaven is representative of sin (either the adultery described in verse 1 or, more likely, the arrogant attitude of the congregation that led them to ignore apostolic instruction cf. 1 Corinthians 5:2, 6; 4:6, 18-19). Thus, the call to "clean out the old leaven" (vs. 7) is a call to repentance. This call to repentance is based on what Christ has already done to deliver them from condemnation to sin.

It is clear from reading 1 Corinthians that many in the Corinthian church were struggling with the transformation required to be children of God. In short, their "old man" thinking inhibited their "new man" living. We see this most clearly in their attitudes toward sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 6:12-20), marriage (1 Corinthians 7), idol worship (1 Corinthians 8-10), and the resurrection doctrine (1 Corinthians 15). Throughout the letter Paul corrects Greek and Gnostic concepts that were corrupting the fellowship at Corinth. There was a need for deep-seated change among these brethren. This change was far more profound than behavior modification. They needed to change how they saw the Lord, the world, and one another.

This need for transformation, a radical change in thought and action, is inherent in the Gospel call and the Passover imagery. Israel could not worship God properly while they were enslaved in Egypt. Something had to change. They had to leave Egypt behind. Likewise, we must leave behind the "old man" and move into a new mode of living and thinking. We cannot serve two masters, walk two paths, or be two creatures (Matthew 6:24; 7:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

The need for this change is predicated on the fact that "Christ our Passover" has already been sacrificed. Once the Passover lamb was slain and the blood was put on the doorposts, Israel's deliverance was effectively underway. As a

result, they were to eat the Passover meal dressed and ready for their journey out of Egypt (Exodus 12:11). It is this connection between the slain lamb and transformative change that Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 5:7. He is not only telling those brethren that they need to make changes, but he says it is high time the changes were made.

This transformation is the only legitimate response to the fact that the Passover Lamb has been sacrificed. Paul uses a similar line of reasoning in Colossians. In Colossians 1:13, he proclaims that God “rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son.” This, of course, was accomplished through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. Paul goes on to state that we can be “buried with Him (Jesus) in baptism” and “raised up with Him through faith in the working of God” (Colossians 2:12). He further explains, in verse 13, that “raised up” refers to new life made possible by the forgiveness of our sins. In Colossians 3:1, Paul describes the life we should live as a consequence of being “raised up with Christ.” What he describes in verses 2-17 is, to borrow the language of 1 Corinthians 5, a life free of the “leaven of malice and wickedness.”

Paul makes a similar argument in Romans 6. Christ has died, and we can join Him in His death through baptism (Romans 6:3). We can then be raised to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). This new life is one in which we

are no longer “slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6). As a result, we are to present our “members as slaves of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:13).

To be clear, neither our point in this article nor Paul’s point in his epistles is to diminish the role of grace in our salvation. Just as Israel was hopeless without God’s intervention in Egypt, we are hopelessly lost to sin without His intervention at the cross. Nor are we attempting to balance grace and works as if there is some ledger that must be reconciled. We are noticing that there is only one legitimate and appropriate response to the sacrifice Christ made to deliver us from the condemnation of sin. We must clean out the old leaven, examine our lives, and sweep them clean of any vestige of the old man that we might be a new creature.

Conclusion

The significance of the Passover and its ultimate fulfillment in Christ serves as a reminder of both God’s deliverance and the call to live transformed lives. As believers, we are invited to reflect on the grace that saves us and the responsibilities that come with that grace. Just as the Israelites were called to remove leaven from their homes, we, too, must examine our lives for any remnants of sin and embrace a spirit of repentance and renewal. By recognizing the sacrifice of Jesus as our Passover Lamb, we can strive to embody His teachings and live in accordance with our new identity, free from the bondage of sin and fully engaged in a transformative relationship with God.

Becoming Like Jesus: The Patience of Christ

DON McCLAIN | BRYANT, ARKANSAS

Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. (2 Thessalonians 3:5, NKJV)

Introduction

“Patience Paw Paw, patience!” These words came from the backseat of our Buick Enclave not too long ago. My granddaughter gave me one of those real life, “out of the mouth of babes” experiences. Yes, I have been known to complain about how others drive. Why are so many people compelled to drive like sloths when I am in a hurry? And what is so complicated about blinkers (or directionals, according to some)? They are installed on vehicles for a reason – please use them properly. Please note, this is coming from a person who has to be told repeatedly, “Honey, your blinker is still on,” five or six miles down the road from when I turned it on (Ecclesiastes 7:21–22).

Patience is a recurring theme throughout the Bible and is a virtue many of us struggle with. Patience is portrayed as both a divine attribute and a virtue that God calls His people to embody. In a fast-paced world where instant gratification often reigns, the biblical teaching on patience stands as a countercultural invitation to trust in God’s way, promises, provisions, and timing. Patience can be understood as the ability to endure difficult circumstances, the capacity to wait for God’s timing, and the grace to bear with others’ weaknesses. It is often intertwined with concepts of perseverance, endurance, and long-suffering.

As we are being conformed into Christ’s character and teaching (Matthew 16:24–26; Philippians 2:5; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians



3:18), and as we focus on His example, we are enabled through faith to patiently endure trials, more consistently resist temptation, overcome obstacles, and successfully strengthen our brethren (cf. Hebrews 12:1,2; James 1:2–16; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 15:58).

God Is Patient With Us

The Bible presents God Himself as the ultimate exemplar of patience. In the Old Testament, God is described as “slow to anger” (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15). For instance, in the story of Noah, God delays judgment on a corrupt world, giving people time to repent (Genesis 6:3). Similarly, in the New Testament, 2 Peter 3:9 declares,

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

God’s patience reflects His mercy and love, offering humanity opportunities for redemption rather than immediate punishment (cf. Romans 2:4).

This divine patience sets the stage for understanding patience as a virtue for believers.

If God, who is perfect and just, exercises patience with imperfect humanity, how much more are His followers called to emulate this quality in their own lives? (Ephesians 5:1)

Patience: A Fruit Of The Spirit

In Galatians 5:22-23, patience is listed as a fruit of the Holy Spirit:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

The term “long-suffering” (*makrothymia*) suggests a patient attitude toward others, even in the face of provocation. This patience is not a common human trait but a characteristic cultivated by humbly “walking in the Spirit” (v. 16), i.e., allowing the Spirit to lead us through His revelation. (v. 18; cf. Romans 8:2,14).

The Bible, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, instills within the believer a divinely authored, spiritual perspective. This “wisdom from above” (James 1:5-7; 3:15-18) equips the believer to see this world, and our lives in it, for what they really are. This world is not our home; we are but pilgrims, and our treasures, affections, and longings are to be focussed upon heavenly, spiritual, and eternal things (Matthew 6:19-24; Hebrews 11:13-16). Such reflects Christ’s patience as He endured the cross “for the joy set before him” (Hebrews 12:2).

Patience: Faith To Endure Trials

James 1:2-4 offers a profound perspective:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

The Greek word translated as “patience” here (*hypomonē*) carries the idea of enduring under pressure. Trials, though difficult, are a refining fire that develops patience, leading to spiritual maturity (cf. 1 Peter 1:6-9). This point is also

emphasized by Paul,

“but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Romans 5:3-4).

We have a long list of Biblical heroes, illustrating the great reward of such patience, (Hebrews 11:1-12:2; James 5:10). The story of Job exemplifies this, as he endured immense suffering yet remained steadfast in his trust in God (Job 13:15).

“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful,” (James 5:11).

Patience: Persevering In Hope

Patience reflects eschatological hope—the expectation of Christ’s return and the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promises. Romans 8:25 says, “But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” This forward-looking patience sustains believers through present struggles, anchoring them in the certainty of future glory (Romans 5:3-5). So, patience involves actively waiting on God’s promises, rather than falling for Satan’s offer of immediate pseudo satisfaction, (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5; 1 John 2:15-17; Psalm 27:14). This hope stands upon our faith, (Hebrews 11:1).

Patience: Love Suffers Long

Christians are called to forbear with others’ flaws as God forbears with ours. Jesus modeled this in His interactions with His disciples, patiently teaching them despite their frequent misunderstandings (e.g., Mark 8:17-21). Consider the following directives given by the apostle Paul:

- “Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone

- has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12-14).
- "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).
- "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all." (1 Thessalonians 5:14,15).

Patience is genuine love in action. In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul begins by stating, "Love is patient." This suggests that patience is not merely passive endurance but an active, loving choice to prioritize others' well-being over personal frustration or convenience. It mirrors God's patient love for humanity and becomes a tangible expression of the gospel in a believer's life. We will be much more inclined to work patiently through disagreements and conflicts if we have genuine love for one another! This applies to parenting, our marriages, local churches, and to all of in our dealings with everyone we come in contact with.

Growing In Patience

The negative and destructive impact of impatience abounds in this sin-cursed world. Below are a few signs that we need more patience:

- Are we easily angered, even over insignificant things, and often lose control over our actions or tongues? Do we say and do hurtful things, and are we quick to blame others? Do we tend to fret and worry about things over which we have no control?
- People who are impatient become members of the "throw away" generation, prematurely

- discarding relationships, people, jobs, education, churches, etc., because things are not changing as quickly or as thoroughly as they desire. Are we typically unsettled, discontent, and unhappy? Do we tend to ignore the positive gains we and others have made, focusing on what has not yet been accomplished?
- We become pessimistic and fail to count our blessings. Expecting to see immediate results, we burn ourselves out and neglect other important things. Do we become discouraged when our goals are not instantly realized? Do we lose the ability to take a large goal and break it down into manageable increments? Are we easily overwhelmed by the large tasks ahead of us and lose the hope and motivation to keep on trying.

Most of us recognize the virtue of, and our need for patience. And it sure would be great if acquiring patience was as simple and easy as microwave popcorn — but it isn't. Richard Cecil said "God's way of answering the Christian's prayer for more patience, experience, hope and love often is to put him into the furnace of affliction." Building strength in the physical body requires hard work, pain, time, and diligence. Likewise, building spiritual fortitude, i.e., patience, also requires hard work, pain, time, and diligence (2 Peter 1:5-10).

To gain more patience, let us ask God (James 1:5-6) and do what is necessary to increase our faith. As we increase our knowledge and understanding of God's word, and we become more faithful and consistent doers of God's word (Romans 10:17), our trust in God, as well as our dependence upon Him will be strengthened. Stronger faith engenders greater hope, and as we face and experience life's challenges, hardships, and sorrows, our faith and hope enable us to, with patience, remain "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Conclusion

Patience, in the biblical sense, is far more than passive waiting—it is an active, faith-filled endurance that reflects God's character and advances His purposes. Patience involves trust in God's plan, steadfastness in trials, and a commitment to righteous living, even when the path is difficult.

From the patience of God in delaying judgment to the perseverance of the faithful awaiting Christ's return, Scripture reveals patience as a thread

woven through the tapestry of redemption. For believers, it is a command and virtue that matures through trials and shines brightest in love. As Hebrews 12:1 urges,

"let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

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Moved With Compassion

JIM MICKELLS | SELLERSBURG, INDIANA

There is no doubt the Lord expects His people to do their very best to share the gospel with as many people as possible. Someone well said, “We are saved to save.” Meaning, we are saved by the grace of God to share this message of grace with a lost and dying world so they too can be saved. It seems to me this is an area of the Christian life which is often neglected. Certainly I believe most all could make some improvement in this area, I know I could.

When Christ gave the great commission to His apostles notice what they were told by Him.

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-20).

He had the power or the authority from the Father to send His apostles forward.

- To whom were they to go? All nations.
- What were they to do? Make disciples of these people.
- How were they to become disciples? By being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- After they had become disciples, they were to be further taught – to observe all things He had commanded those whom He had sent (the apostles).
- What had they been sent to do? To make disciples.



- And the promise made – the Lord would always be with them, even to the end of the age.

So, Jesus sent His apostles to make disciples of all nations, who, once taught they were to teach others to follow the Lord as well.

Paul said,

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

Timothy is given the charge to teach the things which the great apostle had taught him to others. He was to share this message with “faithful” men. The word “faithful” is defined as

“trust, faithful; of persons who show themselves faithful in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties; worthy of trust; that can, be relied on” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 514).

Those taught were entrusted with the greatest treasure given to man, the word of God. The

Lord fully expects those “faithful men” to share His message with others. One is not to keep this treasure to themselves, but to share its wonderful message of salvation to all whom they possibly can.

A great reason people fail to share the gospel with others is because of fear. They fear rejection; they fear being asked a question for which they have no answer; they may even fear the loss of friendship from discussing things of a religious nature. Yet there is one thing I believe which will help each of us in being more effective soul winners for the Lord – compassion. It is one of the great characteristics possessed by Jesus which you and I need so badly. Compassion can motivate us to find courage to overcome our fears, etc.

Look at this example of our Lord being moved with compassion, why He was moved, and what He tells us to pray for.

“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:35-39).

“Compassion” is defined as, “*To feel deeply or viscerally, to yearn, have compassion, pity*” (The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament, p. 1306). Jesus could see beyond their present state to eternity and what would happen to them if they were not taught and if they did not become His disciples.

When trying to teach someone the gospel what do we see? A soul lost, separated from God because of their sins. One who will suffer in hell throughout eternity, experience outer darkness, weeping, gnashing of the teeth, where their worm does not die, the fire is not quenched, and there is everlasting fire and punishment (Matthew 25:41,46; Mark 9:43-48). The hymn “You Never Mentioned Him To Me,” reminds us of what could happen if we failed to teach someone the gospel of Christ, one whom we may have met often. The chorus says,

*“You never mentioned Him to me,
You helped me not the light to see;
You met me day by day ay by day
And knew I was astray,
Yet you never mentioned Him to me.”*

Lord help us to have the compassion to see a lost soul needing to be led to the light of Your word, and may we be willing to share Your gospel with them.

Where is Paul's Letter to the Laodicean Church?

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

The apostle Paul mentioned the brethren at Laodicea multiple times in his epistle to the Colossians. He had never seen them face to face, but he was concerned for the faith of the Christians in both cities (Colossians 2:1-10). At the close of the Colossian letter, Paul forwarded greetings from Epaphras, his fellow prisoner and a native of Colosse (Colossians 4:12; Philemon 1:23). The apostle was moved by this man's zeal for his brethren in Colosse, as well as neighbouring Laodicea and Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13). Paul extended his own greetings to the Christians in Laodicea through the Colossian church (Colossians 4:15).

His final reference to the Laodiceans is in Colossians 4:16. It reads:

Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

Paul expected the church at Colosse to share their letter with the Laodicean brethren. In turn, the apostle wanted the Colossians to read the epistle he sent to Laodicea. I have some questions and concerns. Where is the Laodicean epistle? Is it missing or do we have access to it? Is this Laodicean letter an inspired work or uninspired? If it is an inspired letter and is missing – well, that's a problem. If it is an uninspired letter, why would Paul set it on par with the Colossian letter, which is accepted as an inspired work? Let's consider some options.

The Muratorian Fragment & Marcion's Canon

In the mid-1700s, Italian historian Ludovico Muratori discovered a fragment in the



Ambrosian Library. It was part of a Latin codex by an unidentified author, presumed to be bound in the 8th century AD. A canon of accepted New Testament books was given, but also comments on rejected words, including an epistle *"to the Laodiceans, another to the Alexandrians, forged in Paul's name for the sect of Marcion, and several others, which cannot be received in the catholic Church; for it will not do to mix gall with honey."*

Marcion's canon (circa 150 AD) contained just eleven books: a shortened version of Luke's Gospel, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Laodiceans, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. There is no information available on the content of the book Marcion identified as the Laodicean Epistle.

In The Latin Vulgate

There is a Laodicean letter which found its way into the Latin Vulgate. This short, single chapter text appeared in various works from the 4th century onward, including Wycliffe's English Bible, as well as Medieval German Bibles, though Luther excluded it. This brief letter is unknown to

any Greek copy of the Scriptures. Jerome, who translated the Vulgate from the Hebrew and Greek texts said of this supposed letter to Laodicea, “*Some read one also to the Laodiceans, but it is rejected by everyone.*” (De Viris Illustribus, 5)

The text of this pseudo-Laodicean letter is a patchwork of statements from Paul’s epistles to Galatia, Philippi, and Colosse. Here is the text:

1. Paul, an apostle, note⁴ of men, but by Jesus Christ, to the brethren at Laodicea.
2. Grace unto you; and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. I give Christ thanks in my every prayer, that you are enduring in Him and persevering in His good works, looking for the promise of the day of judgment.
4. Let not the vain speeches of any trouble you, that they may turn you away from the truth of the gospel which I preached.
5. And now, may God cause those who are of me shall continue ministering unto the increase of the truth of the Gospel and accomplishing goodness, and the work of salvation, even eternal life.
6. And now my bonds are seen, which I suffer in Christ, and so I am glad and I rejoice.
7. And this is for my eternal salvation, which comes through your prayers and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, whether it be by life or by death.
8. For truly to me, to live is to be in Christ, and to die is a joy.
9. And he will work his mercy in you, so that you will have the same love and be of one mind.
10. So beloved, as you have heard in my presence, so hold fast and work in the fear of God, and eternal life will be yours.
11. Since it is God that works in you.
12. Do whatever you do without hesitation.
13. And for the rest, beloved, rejoice in Christ and beware of those who are out for sordid gain.

14. Let all your petitions be made openly before God. And be yet steadfast in the mind of Christ.
15. And what is sound and true and sober and just and lovable, do these things.
16. And what you have heard and accepted, hold it in your heart, peace will be yours.
17. Salute all the brethren with a holy kiss.
18. The saints salute you.
19. The grace of the Lord Jesus with your spirit.
20. And cause that this be read to the Colossians; and that the Colossians to you.

Having read the writings of Paul, it is hard to imagine him dictating this and sending it to a congregation. There is no meaningful message, relevant theme, or discernible flow to this supposed Pauline epistle. Knopf and Kruger call it *“nothing other than a worthless patching together of [canonical] Pauline passages and phrases, mainly from the Epistle to the Philippians.”*

Imagine yourself as a member of the church at Colosse. The group has received and read very carefully copies of Paul’s letters to Thessalonica. Maybe they’ve even had access to and benefited greatly from the letters sent to Corinth. Several weeks ago, a messenger arrived with an epistle addressed to the Colossian church from Paul. What a blessing! Though he had never been to Colosse, Paul sought to encourage their faith. The church has read and reread this Spirit-given masterpiece from the apostle. It has focused their minds upon the pre-eminence of Christ in the church and in all creation. The brethren have been encouraged to grow in the knowledge of God’s way, setting aside human wisdom and philosophy which distract from true holiness. Paul has urged the brethren to put off the deeds and attitudes of the flesh and to become imitators of the character and service of Christ. It has been a rich time of faith-building study.

As instructed by the apostles, the churches have exchanged letters. A messenger from Colosse made the 30 km round-trip to deliver a copy of their letter to Laodicea and has returned with a copy of Paul's writing to their sister church. Now, the church has gathered for the wisdom of God given to the apostle for the Laodiceans and beyond to be read aloud. And the messenger reads the 20-verse mess we noted above. What was that? How disappointing! Surely such a lackluster and disjointed writing did not come from the apostle Paul – and further, from the Spirit of God.

Do We Have The Laodicean Letter?

Earlier we asked whether the Laodicean letter is inspired or not. I am confident it is. Given Paul's emphasis on inspiration (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:16; etc.), it seems unlikely Paul would set an uninspired work on par with an inspired text. But if it is an inspired text and is missing, that is a problem. I don't believe it is missing. I am confident we have access to it, but it has been mislabeled. In the 63 English translations available on biblegateway.com, all but two mention Ephesus in Ephesians 1:1. It is worth noting that many include a footnote acknowledging the most ancient manuscripts do not contain Ephesus, the reference to Ephesus was added in some later manuscripts, and other such comments. The Revised Standard Version (and RSVCE) text simply read, "...to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus...", with a footnote stating, "other ancient authorities read who are at Ephesus and faithful." Among the manuscripts without the Ephesus reference are Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, P⁴⁶, 1739, etc..

In his work, "Against Marcion" (Bk 5, Ch 17), Tertullian stated, "We have it on the true tradition of the Church, that this epistle was sent to the Ephesians, not to the Laodiceans." I have no reason to doubt Tertullian's contention that

his contemporaries believed the letter was to Ephesus. With all due respect to Tertullian, that alone is not proof. In fact, I would suggest if the copies of the letter available in Tertullian's day read, "...to the saints who are at Ephesus..." his appeal would have been to the syntax of the letter, not "the true tradition of the Church."

There is internal evidence indicating the epistle was not written to Ephesus. Consider:

Personal remarks. When writing to brethren he was familiar with, Paul would refer to visits and include names of brethren in his greetings (1 Corinthians 2:1; 16:15-17; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 4:11-14; Philippians 1:27, 30; 4:2, 18; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Where are the personal remarks in the Ephesians letter? He worked in Ephesus for 3 years (Acts 19:8-10; 20:31)! He was familiar with the brethren there (1 Corinthians 16:8; 2 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:18), and yet there is not a single personal reference in the epistle. Colossians 2:1 tells us Paul had never been to Laodicea. That would explain the absence of any personal remarks.

The meeting in Miletus. Acts 20 records a meeting between Paul and the Ephesian elders. He warned of troubles to come (Acts 20:29-31), and yet there is no mention of any troubles on the horizon in the letter we call Ephesians.

Share the letters. Paul instructed the Colossian and Laodicean brethren to exchange letters (Colossians 4:16). The Colossian letter and the epistle we call Ephesians are analogous. In fact, about ½ of the 155 verses in Ephesians have a verbal parallel in Colossians. Almost 80% of the 95 verses in Colossians correlate with passages in Ephesians. Obviously, the letters share a host of topics, and yet each presents unique details making them complementary.

- Ephesians 1:21 exalts Christ above all principality and power while Colossians 1:15-17 exalts Him as the Creator of all things.

- After identifying Jesus as the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18), the Colossian letter refers to the Christ as the fullness of God (1:19) while the Ephesian letter focused on the church as the fullness of Christ (1:23).
- Both texts speak about the abolition of the law (Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:14-15) but with different yet equally important outcomes observed. Ephesians concentrates on the unity of Jews and Gentiles in one body (Ephesians 2:14-22), but Colossians on the freedom from the wiped out and disarmed law (Colossians 2:14-17).
- The Lord's provision to join and knit together the body resulting in growth is found in both epistles (Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 2:19). However, the context in the Ephesian letter warns about being led astray by false doctrine and wickedness (Ephesians 4:14, 17-19) whereas the Colossian text cautions against human philosophy, idolatry, and asceticism (Colossians 2:11, 18-23).
- Both texts compel us to teach one another in song (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). In the Colossian letter, this is couched within a 4-verse span (Colossians 3:14-17) where the apostle extolled the need for love and wisdom as we do the will of God. In the parallel, Paul took 21 verses to elaborate on this thought, instructing us to walk in love (Ephesians 5:1-7), in light (Ephesians 5:8-14), and in wisdom (Ephesians 5:15-21).
- These are just a few examples of how these two books are woven together, providing the reader a greater and more full comprehension of God's will. More could be said as the books discuss our reconciliation and inheritance (Ephesians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:26), the old man and the new man (Ephesians 4:16-32; Colossians 3:4-15), various human relationships (Ephesians 5:22-6:9; Colossians 3:18-4:1), and more.

The same messenger. Both the letter to the church at Colosse and its parallel, which we identify as Ephesians, were delivered by Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7).

Paul heard of their faith. In Colossians 2:1 Paul clearly stated that he had never met the Christians in Colosse or Laodicea. They had not seen his face. Thus, Paul's familiarity with the faith of the Colossians was based upon hearing about their faith (Colossians 1:4, 7, 9). He hadn't seen their faith and certainly was not involved in teaching them. Ephesians 1:15 uses the same terminology, "...after I heard of your faith..." as Colossians 1:4, 9. Paul hadn't heard of the faith of the Ephesians – he saw their faith and was responsible for bringing many in Ephesus to the faith. Paul mentions his role in bringing people to the Lord in other places (1 Corinthians 4:15; Galatians 4:19; Philemon 1:10) but makes no such statement in Ephesians – in fact, he mentions no names in the book except Tychicus, who delivered the letter (Ephesians 6:21).

Conclusion

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." (Isaiah 40:8)

The prophet affirmed the indestructibility of God's word. It is not like man or the works of men. The apostle Peter quoted Isaiah's words in 1 Peter 1:22-25, applying it to the gospel message which was proclaimed and written down (2 Peter 1:12-15, 19-21). Peter counted the writings of Paul to be Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16). Paul instructed the twin cities of Colosse and Laodicea to exchange letters because they were reciprocal in nature. And no doubt these letters were both shared, not just with one another, but beyond, just as the rest of the New Testament scriptures.

The Laodicean letter has not been lost, as some suppose. It is not the 20-verse medley of miscellaneous Pauline phrases which appeared long after Paul and only in the Latin language. I am confident the book of Laodiceans has continued to our day, but it has been mislabeled as Ephesians.

I don't suggest we scratch out the reference to Ephesus in 1:1 of the epistle and begin referring to it as Laodiceans. It is known by the name Ephesians throughout the world in almost every translation in almost every language. It would cause more confusion than good to even suggest a name change to the 10th book of the New Testament. However, I believe knowledge

is important. It is better for people to know the letter is present but mislabeled than to be ignorant. I would rather inform brethren about such things than allow them to be taken by surprise by an opponent of the Bible seeking to cast doubt on the Scriptures. We can have confidence in the Scriptures. Indeed, it lives and abides forever (1 Peter 1:23-25).

Sources

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_the_Laodiceans
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muratorian_fragment
- vulgate.org/nt/epistle/laodiceans.htm
- Study Guide to Ephesians and Colossians, Keith Sharp (via padfield.com)

JULY 2025 PREVIEW

EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Shane Carrington will write our next article in the Hall of Faith series from Hebrews 11, focused on the faith of Samson.

CHURCH ARTICLE

Mark Roberts looks at the second in our series on the seven churches of Asia, the letter to the church at Smyrna.

WORSHIP ARTICLE

In memory of my brother and friend, Sean Cavender, who passed in July 2023, we will run an article of his on the collection for the saints in memoriam.

APPLICATION ARTICLE

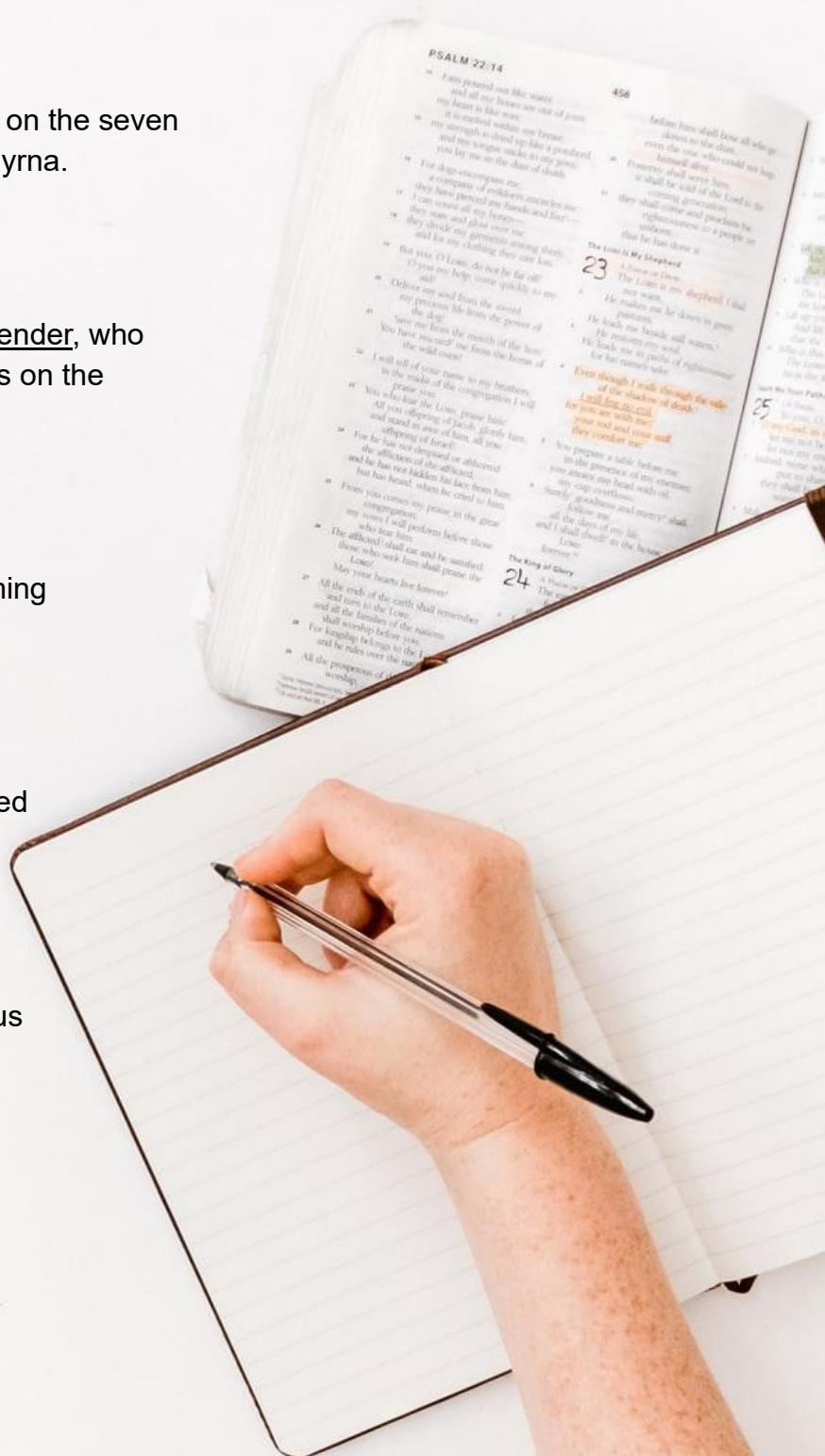
Tim McPherson pens our next article on becoming like Jesus, focused on purity.

EVANGELISM ARTICLE

Don McClain uses Acts 8:35 to address the need for us to preach Jesus to people.

BEYOND THE BASICS ARTICLE

Bruce Reeves considers the temptation of Jesus Christ and lessons from it to help us.



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