

## Paul's Letters from Prison

### Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians

The book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest at Rome for a period of two years waiting for his trial before the emperor. About his subsequent career, Luke tells us nothing, probably because these facts were already sufficiently well-known to his intended audience.

It is possible that Paul was acquitted at his first hearing, but later rearrested as part of the persecution of Christians in Rome in 64 and 65 B.C. These letters would have been written from Rome during the years 60 to 64 B.C.

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#### Day 217. Psalm 111; Colossians 1:1 - 3:4

#### Christ the True Wisdom

##### Psalm 111

Praise of God the Creator. To know him and fear him is the beginning of wisdom.

##### Colossians 1:1 - 3:4

Colossae was a town in the valley of the river Lycus, inland from the great port of Ephesus. The church there had been founded during Paul's stay in Ephesus through the preaching of one of his fellow-workers, Epaphras, who was with Paul in Rome as he wrote this letter (1:7; 2:1; 4:12).

Since its foundation, the church had been troubled by false teaching and a number of its members had been affected by it. The only evidence for what this teaching might have been is the letter itself. It appears to have called itself a "philosophy" (2:8) with "wisdom" and "fullness" as two of its key concepts. But the "wisdom" it offered was to be gained by strict adherence to various rules and regulations, including circumcision (2:11,16,20-23), and devotion to beings Paul calls angels (2:18) and were probably part of a cosmic hierarchy of spiritual beings.

The twin dangers of this teaching were that it undermined the status of Christ, and perhaps even placed him on a level with the "angels", and secondly that it imposed a series of legalistic requirements as part of a higher "wisdom" open only to a select few. In reply, Paul emphasises the supremacy of Christ and the complete sufficiency of his death on the cross for salvation. He introduces the theme of the letter in his opening prayer: that the church may have knowledge, spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:9). But the knowledge he wants for them is not a theoretical philosophy but practical: the knowledge of God's will which leads to good works of all kinds (1:10-12).

Then follows the detailed argument. First, Jesus is supreme in both creation and salvation. It was through him that the world was made and through him that it was redeemed (1:15-20). Jesus is divine, not in the sense of being a spiritual being like an angel; rather he is the "image of God", the complete revelation of him in bodily form, having the complete "fullness" of God (1:15,19; 2:9). So Jesus and no one else is the treasure-chest in which all the hidden mysteries of "wisdom" are to be found (2:2-3).

Secondly, this fullness of deity, which was in Jesus, is now in Christians. The mystery of the gospel is summed up in seven words: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27). In baptism, Christians identify with Jesus in his death and resurrection (2:11-12) and in doing so they receive his "fullness" (2:10). Our true life is henceforth hidden with Christ (3:3), ready to be revealed in "glory" (1:27; 3:4).

The Christian life is thus not a matter of discovering new levels of secret knowledge, but of living out the gospel as it was first given, the gospel of Jesus as Lord and Saviour (2:6-7). Throughout his argument, Paul reminds the church of the complete salvation won by Jesus' death on the cross, using a variety of images: rescue (1:13), redemption (1:14), forgiveness (1:14; 2:13), reconciliation (1:20-22), death and resurrection (2:12-13), liberation (2:14) and victory over cosmic spiritual powers (2:15). Christian living means discovering the reality of these images in everyday life.

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## **Day 218. Psalm 112; Colossians 3:5 - 4:end; Philemon**

### **Christian Behaviour**

#### **Psalm 112**

The reward of righteousness.

#### **Colossians 3:5 - 4:end**

The "philosophy" at Colossae emphasised various rules, regulations and ascetic practices either as the true form of Christian behaviour or a special calling for the "mature". Real maturity, Paul insists, is not to be found this way (1:28); in fact, these practices do not even work (2:23). They may make us formidably moral on the outside, but they cannot make us holy on the inside. Real Christian maturity is to be found by living out the meaning of Christian baptism. In baptism, we die and are raised to life with Jesus (2:12). This means that the old life is dead (2:20) and a new life begins (3:1), the life of Christ within us (1:27), through whom we have received a new self in his image (3:9-10).

If our old sinful self died in baptism, then we are to "put to death" everything that belongs to it (3:5). That is, in the power that Jesus gives to refuse everything belonging to the old life based on earthly nature, to take these off like an old suit of clothes (3:9) and put on in their place the qualities of Jesus himself (3:12). In three sections of instructions, Paul deals first with behaviour towards other Christians (3:12-17), then within the extended household, which might include slaves (3:18 - 4:1) and finally towards outsiders (4:2-6).

The greetings provide a glimpse of Paul's circumstances. Even in prison in Rome, he is supported by a team of fellow-workers (4:11). Evidently, the quarrel with John Mark which caused his split with Barnabas (Acts 15:37-40) has been resolved (4:10). The greeting to Archippus (4:17) includes a prophetic message.

#### **Philemon**

Comparing the greetings at the end of the letter to Philemon with those in Colossians shows that this short letter must have been written about the

same time (Colossians 4:10-14; Philemon 23-24). In Colossians 4:9 Paul mentions that he is sending Onesimus, who is one of them, and commends him warmly. Onesimus would have needed Paul's recommendation, since he was a slave and had run away from his master, Philemon, a wealthy member of the Colossian church whose home was a regular meeting place (2). Onesimus had made his way to Rome, where he had met Paul and become a Christian (10).

The name Onesimus means "useful", and is typical of someone born into slavery. Although in Philemon's service he had not lived up to it, Paul was finding him a great help and comfort, so much so that he would have liked to keep Onesimus with him. (11,13) However, legally Onesimus was Philemon's property and Paul could not have appropriated him without flouting the laws of the empire. As a Christian, he realised too that master and slave needed to be reconciled as Christian brothers. In sending him home, Paul asks Philemon to forgive him and receive him kindly. If he has robbed Philemon, perhaps to provide money for the escape, Paul asks Philemon to forgive the debt for his sake (18). And there is a strong hint that Paul would like Philemon to go even further than he asks and grant Onesimus his freedom (15-16,21).

We do not know the end of the story, but we do know that there was a bishop of Ephesus later in the century called Onesimus.

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## Day 219. Psalm 103; Ephesians 1 - 3

### The Power at Work in Us

#### Psalm 103

Praise to the Father for all his benefits.

#### Ephesians 1 - 3

In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul urged his readers to set their hearts on the heavenly realm where Christ reigns and where their true lives lie hidden with him. Here, he works out that theme in greater detail, and especially as it concerns the place of Jews and Gentiles together in the Church.

In the heavenly realm, Christians are the inheritors of every spiritual blessing through the work of Christ. We are chosen to be holy and blameless, predestined to be adopted as children, granted redemption and forgiveness and chosen to live to the praise of God's glory (1:4-7,11-12). Through the Holy Spirit, we experience now a foretaste of the full life God intends for us (1:13-14). All these were the special privileges of Israel, God's "chosen" people (Exodus 4:21-23; 19:4-6; Leviticus 5:17-19; 19:1-2; Isaiah 43:1-4,18-21). But now they are to be seen in the context of a wider plan to restore the shattered unity of creation. Jesus, the one in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:17), is to be the source and head of a newly unified creation (1:9-10; Colossians 1:20).

The first stage in the coming unity of all creation in Christ is to be seen in the unity of Jews and Gentiles within the Church. Formerly excluded from the promises made to Israel, the Gentiles are now inheritors of God's blessings. Once known as "far away" (Acts 2:39), Jesus' death brings them near (2:13) and includes them in the "shalom" promised to Israel and which he has now achieved, in which men and women live in harmony with one another and enjoy God's blessing (2:14-19). The Church is pictured as a building in which all find their place as long as they fit in with the foundations and chief cornerstone, Jesus and his apostles (2:19-22). Living in unity, it fulfils the vocation of God's people to bring him praise and glory (2:21-22; Isaiah 43:21).

The unity of God's people, Jew and Gentile alike, is part of the mystery of the gospel. In a passage reminiscent of Colossians 1:24 - 2:3, Paul again refers to the riches of Christ (3:8) and writes of his sufferings for the Church (3:13). Moreover the unity of the Church is a step towards the goal of reconciling the rebellious spiritual principalities and powers and so bringing the whole creation together in Christ (3:10; Colossians 1:16; 2:15).

All this is accomplished by giving us a share in the death and resurrection of Christ. By his mighty power, God raised Christ from the dead and gave him authority over every spiritual power (1:19-21). By the same power, we too are raised from spiritual death, the death of not knowing God, and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (2:1-6). By grace, we are saved from death and raised to a life of good works (2:7-10). Paul himself has received this grace and experiences it as he goes about the good works God has prepared for him: preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (3:2,7). He prays that his readers may know it more fully for themselves (1:16-19; 3:17-19) so that they may receive it by faith (2:8; 3:17) and experience the power of the resurrection in their own lives (3:20-21).

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## Day 220. Psalm 128; Ephesians 4 - 6

### Life Together

#### Psalm 128

The "shalom" in family and community that springs from the fear of the Lord.

#### Ephesians 4 - 6

The second half of Ephesians turns doctrine into practice. God's plan is to reconcile all things in Christ (1:10). The unity of Jews and Gentiles and of people of all backgrounds in the Church is his first step (2:14-16; Colossians 3:11). This united Church is to be the vehicle of God's purpose on a cosmic scale, making known God's will to rebellious spiritual rulers and authorities (3:10).

Therefore, the Church must live up to its calling (4:1). Whenever Paul describes the ethical implications of Christian doctrine, he deals first with relationships in the Church and begins by asking for the qualities needed to live out the unity God has given in Christ (4:2-3; Romans 12:3,10; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:12-14). We have been saved by grace for a life of good works (2:10), and it is in and through the Church that these good works are to take place (4:12). Paul's desire is that we grow to maturity by understanding our calling better and the power God has given us to fulfil it (1:18-21); this too takes place in the Church as we learn from one another, correct and support one another (4:13-16). The Christian life is to be lived along with fellow-believers, all striving together to realise the calling God has given us.

It is, moreover, a process of gradual transformation, based on a new vision of the world. As in his earlier letters, Paul reminds us of the need to put on the new self and to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (4:22-24; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:9-10). The effect of this transformation is to enable us to see things differently, to have "light" where previously we had only "darkness" (4:17-18; 5:8-11). Seeing the world in a new way, we recognise the futility of our previous behaviour or that of others. Instead, we aim to discover the will of God for us (5:10; Romans 12:2), looking in

particular to the example of sacrificial love given to us in Jesus himself (5:1-2; Romans 12:1).

In domestic affairs, the vision Paul sets before us is one of hierarchy redeemed. Whereas both our experience and his was of hierarchy as division and jealousy, his belief was that the natural hierarchies of society could become a means of grace and mutual upbuilding, if only Christians adopted the sacrificial love of Christ as their rule. The theme of the whole letter is the relationship of Christ and the Church (1:10,22-23), and he sees an image of this relationship in that of husbands and wives. As the Church is redeemed by sacrificial love, so the close relationship of man and woman in marriage, beset by the problems which stem from human imperfection, can be redeemed by the same kind of love on the part of both husband and wife. Similarly with parents and children, masters and slaves: sacrificial love, which goes beyond the everyday demands of one's position, can transform the relationship.

The enemies of God's programme of transformation are the spiritual principalities and powers (6:12). These have been defeated in the heavenly realms by the death and resurrection of Jesus (1:20-21; Colossians 2:15), and now need to be defeated on earth. If they could, they would like to disrupt the saving and transforming work of Christ. The defensive armour to defeat them is not our own, but that won for us by Jesus (6:14-17). We need actively to "take" it and keep it in place by prayer, including, for those who have it, the use of the gift of tongues (6:18). Living the Christian life can be like a battle, in which the enemy is never tired of trying to discourage us - another reason why Christians need to practise life together in the fellowship of the Church (6:21-22).

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## Day 221. Psalm 33; Philippians 1 - 2

### Partnership in the Gospel

#### Psalm 33

The Lord, the defender of his people.

#### Philippians 1 - 2

Philippians is an intensely personal letter, written to a church Paul knew well, in response to a gift, which had been brought by one of their own members, Epaphroditus (4:18). With Paul, even a simple thank you letter becomes an occasion for profound theology. The gift was evidence of the fellowship or partnership in the gospel which he shared with them. Reflection on this fellowship or common life is one of two main themes of the letter, along with encouragement to remain firm in the faith and to grow in it to maturity (1:5-6). As usual, his concern is that Christians should increase in the kind of practical knowledge which leads to the discernment of God's will and fruitful lives in his service (1:9-11; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 3:16-21; Colossians 1:9-10).

In the greeting (1:1-2) the word "overseer" translates the Greek *episkopos*, the origin of the title "bishop". Here, Paul mentions two of what became the three-fold order of ministry in churches in the Catholic tradition: bishops, priests and deacons. "Priests" are a development of "presbyters" or "elders", whom Paul also appointed in his churches (Acts 14:23). Although the three titles existed in the New Testament Church, they did not mean exactly the same thing. The relationship between overseers, elders and deacons was a good deal more fluid.

Years before, to the elders of Ephesus, Paul had said that his life meant nothing to him except the chance to proclaim the gospel in response to his calling (Acts 20:24). Here again, he sees his position in prison only in terms of the opportunities it gives or denies to further the work he has been given. To remain living is not the point; death, if it completes a life of faithful service, will be far better. Only the knowledge of further work to do leads him to hope for time in which to do it (1:19-25). He is realistic enough to know that not all who preach the gospel do so from motives of love. Christian service is as capable as anything else of being used as a vehicle for

selfish ambition, but he can afford to be generous to his opponents (1:15-18).

Selfish ambition is one of the failings which impairs the partnership within the churches he longs to see. The common life is promoted by humility and love for one another (2:1-4). This sharing is both a sharing in the Spirit (2:1) and in the attitude of Christ himself, the servant King (2:5-11). To describe the humility and exaltation of Jesus, Paul probably draws on an early Christian hymn, which would have been well known in Philippi. The common life includes a sharing in prayer (1:19) as well as the exchange of messages (2:19-end). It also means sharing in suffering (1:29-30); to suffer for the gospel is to share the sufferings of Jesus (3:10).

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## Day 222. Psalm 34; Philippians 3 - 4

### Faith for the Future

#### Psalm 34

The Lord protects those who trust in him, even in trouble.

#### Philippians 3 - 4

In chapter 3, Paul turns to the second of his two themes: the prayer that his friends in Philippi continue to grow to maturity (1:6; 2:12-13). Genuine Christian maturity is prevented if it becomes a matter of satisfying legal requirements. The "circumcision party", who insisted on Gentile Christians conforming to the demands of Jewish Law, including circumcision, were still strong in Jerusalem and may have posed a danger in Greece and Macedonia, where Philippi was situated. In this very personal letter, Paul uses a personal argument. He himself has chosen to abandon any attempt to please God by membership of a chosen elite, lawkeeping or "good works." He counts all these as belonging to the "flesh", by which he means the self-oriented life. In the same way, if we are tempted to count such things as wealth, power, ability, position or good looks as a recommendation they become an obstacle to knowing Christ (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). To know Jesus is of such surpassing worth, that none of the gifts and advantages of this life can be compared with it. He is like the treasure hidden in a field or the pearl of surpassing worth in his own parables (Matthew 13:44-46; 1 Corinthians 1:31; Colossians 2:2-3). So Paul can write, "To live is Christ" (1:21); nothing else in life satisfies, and the life which is oriented to God must have Christ as its centre.

To live by faith in God means far more than trusting in Christ alone for salvation. It means making it our surpassing aim to know him more deeply (3:7-8). As always in Paul, drawing on his Jewish rather than his Greek heritage, such knowledge is practical. To know Christ can only be achieved by conforming to the pattern of his life, the two-fold pattern of crucifixion and resurrection. Christ humbled himself and became obedient to death before being exalted as Lord (2:6-11). For Christians to know him means to experience the power of his resurrection (3:10; Ephesians 1:19-21; 3:20) and to share in his sufferings (3:10; Ephesians 3:13; Colossians 1:24; 2

Corinthians 1:8-9). To allow God the Father to mould us in this way, to see this moulding as an ongoing process and submit to it for the course of our lives is what true maturity means, in contrast to some legalistic cul-de-sac (3:12-19). The destination and fulfilment of our growth to maturity and the only place we shall be truly complete is with Christ himself in heaven. It is when he appears that we shall be revealed in glory (Colossians 3:4), a glory which will take bodily form (Philippians 3:21). Interestingly, in this letter, Paul mentions all three facets of the heavenly hope: the idea of going to be with Jesus after death (1:23), the final resurrection (3:11) and the personal return of Christ (3:20).

In his final greeting and thanks for the gift the Philippians had sent, Paul draws on it to urge one final lesson: abandonment to divine providence. He wants them to set their minds on heavenly rather than earthly things (4:8; Colossians 3:1); to trust in God for financial provision (4:6,19); to submit all their anxieties to him and find his peace in times of stress (4:6-7; Psalm 55:22); to learn to be content in all circumstances (4:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18); and to find reasons for rejoicing at all times (3:1; 4:4,10).

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with the problems in Ephesus and Rome, before being rearrested prior to the writing of 2 Timothy.

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## The Pastoral Epistles

### 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus

These three letters form a clearly defined group, distinguished from the other letters of Paul by their subject matter and style. In subject matter, they are instructions on the proper ordering of the local church to Timothy and Titus, who had been sent as apostolic delegates to Ephesus and Crete respectively to take temporary charge. This suggests that, learning from his experience in Corinth, Paul had decided to take action before things got too far out of hand. The difficulties Timothy and Titus might have had in asserting Paul's authority are not overlooked (1 Timothy 4:11-12) but do not seem to have been too great, at least in Paul's mind.

In style and vocabulary the Pastoral Epistles show clear differences from the other letters of Paul, so much so that many New Testament scholars have suggested that the letters were not written by Paul at all but by a later leader of the Church wishing to use his authority. The practice of "pseudonymity", using the name of someone else in a letter or book, was widespread in the first and second centuries. However, the differences between these letters and Paul's earlier ones are satisfactorily explained by:

- the differences in content: Paul was writing to individuals about church government, and the purpose is primarily pastoral rather than theological;
- the lapse in time: Paul had probably spent most of the previous few years in Rome and the western Mediterranean, possibly using a good deal of Latin, which would have an effect on his style;
- the use of a different secretary: Paul's letters would not simply have been given at dictation speed; there was scope for the writer to "tidy up" the grammar if he was confident and able enough to do so.

If written by Paul, we have to assume that he was released from the imprisonment recorded at the end of Acts and continued his missionary endeavours for a short time, probably looking to visit places so far untouched by the gospel message and leaving Timothy and Titus to deal

## Day 223. Psalm 101; 1 Timothy 1 - 4

### Order in the Church

#### Psalm 101

A ruler's promise.

#### 1 Timothy 1

The main reason for sending Timothy to Ephesus was to combat a group who were teaching false doctrines. From the evidence of the letter itself, these seem to have had some relation to the ones Paul had come across earlier in Colossae. There is a very strong Jewish strand, represented by the Law (1:7-9) and the refusal to eat certain foods (4:3), mixed with philosophical speculations (1:4) and a streak of asceticism (4:3). Apparently, Paul had already punished the two principal teachers, Hymenaeus and Alexander, by putting them out of the church (see 1 Corinthians 5:5), thereby consigning them to the "dominion of darkness" (Colossians 1:13) and of Satan.

In reply to their teaching, based on Law, Paul emphasises again that it is through grace and grace alone that we are saved (1:12-17), and that our rule of conduct is not to be slavish obedience to external rules but the internal testimony of a good conscience (1:5,19; 3:9).

#### 1 Timothy 2

Paul goes on to insist on the importance of obedience to authority and quiet and godly lives, presumably because the false teachers were challenging these and causing disputes.

The references to women in this chapter have caused much anguish and division in the Church down the centuries. But as with 1 Corinthians 11, it is unlikely that Paul intended to forbid women any teaching or leadership role or give them a lower status in the Church than men. If so, he would be knowingly contradicting himself (Galatians 3:26-28; Colossians 3:11). The explanation for this passage is probably that it is written to address the situation in Ephesus. The city was dominated by the cult of Diana the virgin goddess of the moon (Acts 19:23-28) and the Temple and its

administration were in the hands of an exclusive caste of female Temple servants. From the evidence of the letter we can guess that these women denigrated marriage (4:3) and child-bearing (2:15) and looked on men as second-class citizens (2:12). Paul's concern was to prevent the women of the Ephesian church becoming overbearing like those of the Temple cult.

#### 1 Timothy 3

One of Timothy's tasks was to make sure that the local church leaders were fit for their office. These leaders included women. The words in 3:11 translated "wives" in N.I.V. mean simply "the women" and since the instructions to deacons continue from 3:8 to 3:13, it is probable that they are women deacons. The Church is "God's household" (3:15) and managing it is like managing a family (3:5). Although it may include people with failings of all kinds, its leaders must be "above reproach".

#### 1 Timothy 4

As Paul's delegate, Timothy is to take authority and use it (4:11-12). He is to guard his own life against sins which could undermine his authority (4:16) and set an example to others (4:12). His ministry is to be based on Scripture, interpreted by preaching, teaching and the gift of inspired prophecy (4:13-14).

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## Day 224. Psalm 15; 1 Timothy 5 - 6; Titus

### Sound Doctrine

#### Psalm 15

The quality of life that makes worship genuine.

#### 1 Timothy 5 - 6

From the earliest days, the Church made provision for the widows among its number (Acts 6:1). Unable to own property or to earn a living on their own, such women depended on their family to keep them. But looking after a large number of widows soon caused problems for the Church, the chief of these being to make sure that those who received the Church's money did not bring Christian faith into disrepute by their manner of life. So Paul counsels great care and a rigorous set of conditions before a woman receives the support of the Church. If she is young, she should marry and have children (5:11-15). If she has family, they should support her (5:4,8,16). If she is to be supported, she should be living an exemplary life (5:5). In fact, by the time all Paul's conditions have been met, the widows have become a full-time serving order of older women (5:9-10).

Similarly, if elders are to be supported by the church (5:17), they too should live exemplary lives (5:19) and it is wise to be careful before ordaining anyone or recognising them for public ministry (5:22). The Church's money should not go to any who are governed by the love of money and Timothy should be especially on the lookout for those who teach false doctrine as a sign of someone preaching for money rather than the honour of God (6:3-10).

Both slaves (6:1-2) and the rich (6:17-19) are to see their status as an opportunity to serve God and bring him honour.

#### Titus

The "straightening out" that was needed in Crete (1:5) was the appointment of men of sound doctrine and good life to positions of responsibility throughout the island as a check on the spread of false teaching. The emphasis in Paul's greeting is on the truth (1:1-2) and the need for a

genuine calling to preach God's word (1:3). He sees false doctrines, especially those of the Jewish circumcision party, as a cancer eating away at the Church from the inside and false teaching as inevitably linked with a sinful life (1:10-end; 3:9-11). It is Titus' job to root out such false teaching and ensure sound doctrine in its place.

Sound doctrine is measured by a good life. The emphasis on justification by faith in his earlier letters had opened Paul to the accusation that he cared nothing for the believer's quality of life (Romans 6:1,15), a slander he took pains to deny. Christians are saved by grace for a life of good works under God's direction (3:4-8; Ephesians 2:8-10). The quality of their lives is to be seen as evidence of the genuineness of their faith (Colossians 1:9-10). So for Titus, to teach what is in accord with sound doctrine (2:1) means ensuring that Christians live godly lives, which reflect credit on Christ and the Christian community (2:2-14).

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## Day 225. Psalm 71; 2 Timothy

### Perseverance

#### Psalm 71

An old man asks for God's help in time of trial.

#### 2 Timothy

Since he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul had been arrested and taken to Rome, probably by way of Miletus and Corinth (4:20) and there put on trial (4:16). If he travelled through Miletus, it is possible that he was actually arrested in Ephesus, since the cities are very close. On his arrest, none of his friends in the province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the chief city, had stood by him (1:15). Moreover, from the evidence of this letter, Timothy's mission to oppose the false teachers in Ephesus had not been very successful. The outlook was bleak and Paul writes to Timothy, not only to urge him to come to Rome but to strengthen him against the hardships of persecution, the disappointment of failure and the desertion of former friends.

Even in these trying circumstances, Timothy must not be ashamed either of the gospel or of Paul himself, despite his disgrace in the eyes of the world (1:8). The attitude he should have is that of a soldier, who expects hardship and danger as part of his calling and is prepared to face up to it (2:4). He is to see his recent disappointments as an athlete's training, preparing him for the prize (2:5) or a farmer's patient hard work as he waits for the eventual harvest (2:6-7). He should remember the predictions of the troubles to come in the last days (3:1-5) and see the defection of the Ephesians and the apparent success of his opponents as examples of what to expect (3:6-9). Jannes and Jambres are names given in later Jewish literature to Pharaoh's magicians, who despite their great power and secure position were brought to shame in the end (Exodus 8:18-19).

Paul does not pronounce final judgment on the false teachers, but leaves God to be their judge. However, he does judge their actions: only God knows who are his, but as teachers of the faith, they should have nothing to do with wickedness (2:19). They are fit only to be ignoble vessels, whereas Timothy's aim should be to distance himself from evil and become a useful

instrument for God's service (2:20-22). He should treat his opponents with courtesy but not be afraid to teach the truth clearly and rebuke them firmly (2:14-16,24-26).

In following Paul's advice, Timothy has his own heritage of faith to draw upon (1:4-5). He has the gift of the Holy Spirit to provide the inner resources for persevering service (1:6-7). He has the Scriptures and he should study them diligently and preach them boldly (3:14 - 4:2), not being disappointed or discouraged when people don't listen (4:3-5). Finally, he should take to heart the example of Paul himself, who has endured a life of hardship and now looks forward beyond his coming death to the reward for faithful service (1:8-12; 3:10-12; 4:6-8)

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## 1 Peter

Like Paul, tradition has it that Peter spent the last years of his life in Rome, dying during Nero's persecution in about 64 A.D. Unlike Paul, however, little is known about Peter's career between the Council of Jerusalem described in Acts 15 and his death. From Paul's epistles, we hear of a visit to Antioch (Galatians 2:11) whose date is uncertain (see notes on Galatians 2). We also know that he travelled as an apostle accompanied by his wife (1 Corinthians 9:5) The opening verses of 1 Peter suggest that he must have travelled widely and visited a large number of churches. The letter was written to Christians throughout the area of present day Turkey. Many of these, though not all, were churches where Paul had first evangelised, in company with Silas, and Silas was associated with Peter in sending his letter (5:12), perhaps as the drafter of it.

Peter was writing from Rome, the great city and enemy of the Church referred to as Babylon in 5:13 as well as in Revelation 17:1-9. The Christians he wrote to were facing persecution, though not necessarily the state-sponsored persecutions which began under Nero. Christians might be denounced to the local magistrates because of the envy of their neighbours or, especially in cities such as Ephesus with thriving idol-cults, become scapegoats for bad harvests, trading losses or other evils. At Rome, however, Nero's persecution may have been well under way and Peter aware that his life might soon come to an end. The inheritance laid up in heaven for him (1:4) would have been very real.

The thought of the letter is very close to much of Paul's writing. This may be because Peter had met Paul and spoken to him often, or because Silas was involved with him in writing the letter or because both Peter and Paul drew on the same early Christian traditions, especially those to do with appropriate behaviour (2:13 - 3:12). The similarities include:

- the reference to the Trinity in the opening address (1:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14);
- the resurrection hope encouraging us to remain steadfast in trials (1:3-6; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; 2 Timothy 4:7-8);
- the gospel message revealed in the last times (1:20; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 3:10-11; Colossians 1:26);

- the importance of exemplary good lives (2:11-12; Philippians 2:14-15);
  - the discipline of submission as the way of redeeming relationships (2:13,18; 3:1; Romans 13:1; Ephesians 5:21)
  - the Christian response as dying to sin and living to righteousness (2:24; Romans 6:2-4; Colossians 3:1-11).
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## Day 226. Psalm 118; 1 Peter 1 - 2

### A Living Hope

#### Psalm 118

A processional psalm, in which the King gives praise to God for rescuing him from his enemies.

#### 1 Peter 1 - 2

In the opening address, Peter refers to his readers as "exiles of the Dispersion" (1:1). Since the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the exile of the Jewish people, the prophets had been foretelling and the Jews eagerly awaiting a great home-coming when God's people would return to a restored land and experience his blessing once again. For Peter, however, it is the people of the new covenant, the Christian Church, who are the scattered exiles, sprinkled with the blood of Christ (1:2) rather than the blood of the old covenant (Exodus 24:8). And the inheritance they await is the one which is theirs in heaven.

Peter's thought was saturated in the Old Testament and the hopes of Israel. Christians are God's chosen people (1:2; 2:9), the death and resurrection of Jesus fulfil the hopes of the prophets (1:10-12); Christians are to be holy as God is holy (1:15-16; Leviticus 19:2); they are both the new Temple and the new priesthood (2:4-5); they inherit the promises to the Jews (2:9-10; Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 43:21); Jesus is both the Passover Lamb (1:19; Exodus 12:5) and the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (2:21-25).

To strengthen his readers in persecution, Peter reminds them of the hope of resurrection which they have to look forward to (1:3-5). He wants them to see their trials as something given to perfect their faith and make them ready for the Lord (1:6-7). They should see their lives as a battle, in which they will need steadfast minds and hearts (1:13). They are strangers in this world (1:1,17; 2:11), rescued from it by the precious blood of Jesus (1:18-19) and given all the privileges of God's chosen people (2:9-10).

In view of the trials facing the Church, it is important that Christians live exemplary lives. There is a danger that if they yield to temptation even a small amount they may easily be led astray. They should avoid the sins

they committed before becoming Christians (1:14) and aim for holiness (1:15-16), living in the fear of the Lord (1:17). They should feed their minds and hearts by the study of the Bible, the word of the Lord, which is the seed by which they received new birth (1:23 - 2:2). In their conduct, they should practise the discipline of submission (2:13,18), taking as an example Jesus the Servant, who endured undeserved suffering in order to win our salvation (2:21-25).

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## Day 227. Psalm 119:57-80; 1 Peter 3 - 5

### Perseverance in Trial

#### Psalm 119:57-80

Despite affliction, the writer puts his trust in God to save him.

#### 1 Peter 3 - 5

Peter is writing to Christians facing a hostile environment. His advice is that in all circumstances Christians should be humble, submissive and self-controlled, not watching for their rights but content to suffer if need be, trusting God to judge them justly and to bring them to final salvation.

Wives should not pursue outward attractiveness but the inward beauty of a humble spirit, trusting God to protect them from the possible ill-treatment of their non-believing husbands (3:1-6). All Christians should be ready to put up with insult and injustice if need be without retaliating. For encouragement, we have the example of Jesus, who though mocked, ill-treated and finally crucified was raised from death in triumph (3:13-18).

To encourage his readers facing trials, Peter develops a complex argument to demonstrate that through baptism all Christians share in Jesus' victory over the spiritual principalities and powers which are the instigators of their persecution. On his ascension, Jesus passed through the heavens to reach the throne of God. According to the way the Jews saw the world at that time, he would have had to travel through a succession of lower heavens. In some of these he would have come across the rebellious spiritual powers imprisoned there, to whom he proclaimed his victory (3:19). The account of how these spirits were punished is found in the story of the rebellious angels in Genesis 6:1-4. Since this story comes immediately before that of the Flood, Peter can write that they were punished in the days of Noah (3:20). The Flood through which Noah and his family survived and the world was judged symbolises baptism, through which Christians are saved and the disobedient world is judged. Jesus' victory over the world comes through his death and resurrection, and through baptism we share in his victory. The authorities and powers which inspire the persecution of Christians have been defeated and will soon be judged.

All we need to do is to be patient and we will soon receive our reward (3:13-end).

So Peter repeats again his advice from 1:13. We should see our lives as a battle against the evil spiritual powers in which our weapons are a good life and a clear conscience (4:1-2). We will all, Christians and non-Christians alike, have to give an account of our lives to God and face his judgment (4:5). (4:6 is a note to those concerned about Christians who die before the second coming of Christ: they have heard the gospel preached to them when they were alive and will be judged in the same way as those still alive when Jesus comes). To face persecution is like facing the first instalment of God's judgment. If it stands the test, our faith comes out purified like gold (4:16-18; 1:6-7).

For Church leaders, Peter's advice is essentially the same. They should be humble and diligent, put their trust in God and be watchful in temptation, looking to the power of God to strengthen them in their trials (5:1-11).