

The Spiritual Order of Paul's Church Epistles

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(1868-1956)

We believe that the order of arrangement of Paul's Epistles to the Churches was Divinely established; and that there is a *progress of spiritual experience* from Romans to II Thessalonians.

ROMANS: *Righteousness Without Works*

In Romans man is shown without righteousness: "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*" This involves man's fundamental relation to God. Christ is set forth a propitiation, and by His death releasing man from the necessity of a righteousness and holiness of his own. Christ becomes his righteousness, and a believer has the witness of the Spirit that he is God's child.

I CORINTHIANS: *Wisdom Without Education*

In I Corinthians the subject is wisdom. The words "*wisdom*" and "*wise*" occur in the first four chapters twenty-five times, and the words "*foolish*" and "*foolishness*" some eight times! The wisdom of the world is "*foolishness*," – therefore God's "*wisdom*" is revealed (2:6-16). In 1:30 we are seen as of God – we that are in Christ Jesus who was "*made unto us wisdom from God*," which indeed includes "*Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption*" but Christ is looked at as our Wisdom. Indeed, in 2:16, "*We have the mind of Christ.*"

II CORINTHIANS: Power Without Strength

In II Corinthians we find Christ our sufficiency. The key verses here are 12:9-10: “*When I am weak then am I strong,*” and, “*My grace is sufficient for thee.*” Many believers never find that God alone is their strength along every line. Paul found it! (Read 1:8-10).

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us (4:7-11).

Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day (4:16).

Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus (7:5-6).

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (12:9).

GALATIANS: Perfecting Without Religion

The Galatians are seeking to be perfected, but it is by turning back to religion, by observing “*days, and months, and times, and years*” (4:10-11). “*Are ye so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are ye now perfected in the flesh?*” (3:3). But Paul goes clear back to Romans six truth, and testifies to these Galatians,

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me (2:20).

He goes back to the truth of II Corinthians 5:17:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

There he sets before us the proper rule of life of the believer in words which completely set aside “*religious life,*” whether Jewish, Romish, or Protestant.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God (6:15-16).

EPHESIANS:
Men on Earth Seated in the Heavens

In Ephesians the marvelous secret is opened out by which all true believers in Christ Jesus are made alive with the raised and glorified Christ – raised up with Him and made to sit in the heavens (no longer in the earthlies as were Israel) and made indeed to become the fullness of Christ our Head, Who fills all in all.

PHILIPPIANS:
A Sample Believer Runs the Course

In Philippians we see Paul as a sample believer of all these glorious truths, running the wonderful “course” toward that coming “day of Christ” (1:6, 10)! Saying, as he runs, “*To me to live is Christ*” (1:21); exhorting, “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*” (2:5-8); crying, as he runs,

I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the Law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death. I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus ... I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded ... For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven ... I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me ... My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Chapter 3, entire; 4:13, 19).

Paul’s word in 3:17, “*Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample,*” is the key of Philippians. By the grace of God certainly, but none the less true, Paul was enabled to run the Christian race in all its fullness!

COLOSSIANS:
Heavenly Men on Earth Filled with His Fullness

In Colossians we see heavenly men on earth – yet holding fast the Head in heaven, and becoming filled with His fullness. All the fullness of God dwells bodily in Christ, with Whom believers’ lives are hid in God, and Christ becomes the object of all the believer’s thoughts and affections. Since you are raised together with Christ,

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (3:2-3).

The believer is content not to be known or manifested until the glory of Christ comes. Four desperate foes oppose this mystery of faith of holding fast the Head in heaven while walking

on earth: beguilement through enticing words; philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men; the ritual observance of outward ordinances and holy days; the worshipping of angels (2:4, 8, 16, 18).

I & II THESSALONIANS: *The Believer's Blessed Hope*

In I and II Thessalonians Paul gives us the believer's hope – the personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord! Wherefore comfort one another with these words (4:16-18).

The believer who knows himself righteous (Romans), having the mind of Christ (I Corinthians), who has learned to glory in his weakness (II Corinthians), and to walk by the rule of the new creation, knowing that he was crucified with Christ, Who is now living in Him (Galatians), and who sees with Spirit-enlightened eyes the heavenly character and calling of the Church (Ephesians), and is becoming a follower of Paul in the race – running the course unto Christ – “*the day of Christ*” (Philippians), who is holding fast the Head, paying no attention to those who would delude him with persuasiveness of speech and make a spoil of him through “*philosophy*” and would judge us in “*religious*” things or rob us of our prize by turning us to a self-humility that fails to hold fast the Head (Colossians): such a believer is ready indeed for the blessed hope of our Lord Jesus Christ's return (I & II Thessalonians)!

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