

Who Am I?

Unlocking and Understanding the Mystery of Christ

Week Eight

Day Three

LOVE LETTERS FROM GOD

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

(Ephesians 1:2)

Have you ever written a love letter before? Have you ever received a love letter before? Throughout my lifetime, I have witnessed how our society has changed drastically in our written communication. With the internet so relevant in our lives, we have instant access to anyone anywhere. I-messaging, e-mailing, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, texting, and other various forms are common place now and very much socially accepted. I just don't think they are as personal as someone taking time out of their life to hand-write a personal letter,



actually putting a stamp on it and placing it in the mail. I really love receiving letters through the regular mail...you know the mailbox outside your home where all the junk mail and the occasional bill comes to? I remember in college walking down to my mailbox longing for a letter from my future husband. He wrote wonderful letters to me, and I would write him letters of love to help us get through the week. I guess I have to admit though I do like to get the occasional e-mail, there is just nothing like getting an actual letter from someone who cares.



Unlocking the Mystery

Dear Darcy,

Let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Love,

John

The Beloved Disciple,

1 John 4:7-12

Why make such a big deal about writing letters? Because, the New Testament is primarily made up of letters. You may know the term as Epistles, but most of the scriptures we use to guide our Christian walk comes from a letter that Paul or another apostle wrote as a word of encouragement or instruction and out of love from our God. We can look at it

this way. God, through His Holy Spirit, has written the greatest love letter ever written to us through the hands of His obedient servants. Today's lesson will take us through the letters of the New Testament to help us gain a better understanding of who they were written for and why, as well as, by whom and what it means for us today.



Understanding the Word

The Roman Empire was in control; the Emperor Caesar Augustus (**Luke 2:1**) brought in a period of peace and a stable government. The economy prospered and communication improvements came due to the roadway being constructed. Everything appeared to go well as long as people worshiped the Emperor and the gods that were held up over each city. At the time just before Christ, a period of 400 plus years of silence was experienced from God Almighty. Many Jewish people were indifferent to the worship of God and were falling into as much Pagan worship as the rest of society. It was a dark time spiritually. Participation in cults, black magic, and prostitution, as well as, other forms of sexual immorality were very open and accessible.

The Jews encountered periods of persecution followed by periods of indifference from the Roman rulers. The Sanhedrin (Jewish rulers) had become very legalistic, and they actually had their own form of government in place under the Roman government. Jews, for the most part, did not interact with Gentiles unless the Gentile wanted to convert or follow the ways of God.

Rome had Governors and Client Kings over different territories and had Centurions leading bands of soldiers in those areas to keep peace by placing fear into the hearts of the people. Slavery was a very large way of life for many people, and the government was very closely associated with religion since much of the religion was worship of the government leadership.

Then, at just the right time JESUS was born. He came and shook up the Jewish people, but the Romans were pretty indifferent as they welcomed worship of many gods. The Jewish people had Jesus crucified, and for the most part, the Romans didn't care or understand because the overall thought was that it was a sect of Judaism. Where Jesus became offensive was when He claimed to be the **ONLY WAY TO THE ONE TRUE GOD**.

The message of Jesus moved forward following the death, resurrection, ascension, and the day of Pentecost. The message was explained and taught to the Jews, but many would not accept it. Jesus then brought up a leader to take the message to the Gentile nation...the apostle Paul. Paul empowered by the Holy Spirit was accompanied by many Christians to go to the dark, Gentile nations and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Churches were started all over the known world. Paul and his companions would help a church get started and grounded; then, they continued to travel on. Paul was always curious and very concerned about how the church was doing, so he would correspond. To encourage, teach, correct, or send his love, he would write letters to the places he had been. Many of these and letters from other disciples were distributed around the nations. There was eventually a council that adopted many of these letters into the Canon of Scripture...accepted to be donned as God's holy and inspired Word.

Below is a brief breakdown of these letters for you, and one day, when you desire a great study you can use the book of Acts to guide you through the letters and the churches and people they represent. The letters are not listed in chronological order. I know I have thoroughly enjoyed learning of the historical background of these times to prepare for these lessons.

AUTHOR	LETTER	AUDIENCE	REASON	NOTES
13 LETTERS WRITTEN BY PAUL				
	1&2 Thessalonians	Church of Thessalonica	Teaching of the Lord's Second coming	Paul needed to encourage the believers that were standing strong in their faith that whether dead or alive when Jesus returns, they will see Him.
Gospel	Romans	Church in Rome	Nature of Christ's work Justification by Faith	Paul had yet to get there so was sending forth an understanding of the Gospel to the church...bringing together the Jews and Gentiles.
	Galatians	Churches of Galatia	By Grace Not by Law Finality of the Gospel	Many Gentiles had accepted the message but the Jews came in and tried to make them follow Jewish customs also. Paul confronts with the Gospel.
	1&2 Corinthians	The Church of Corinth	Correction of Disorder Reminder of his authority in Christ	These Christians lived in a very Pagan society and the purity of the Gospel was being tarnished and abused, therefore, causing much disorder.
Prison	Ephesians	The Church of Ephesus	The Unity of the Church Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ	Paul instructed the Gentile and Jewish Christian to love each other and stand firm against evil in the world. Everyone has a place in the body of Christ.
	Colossians	The Church in Colossae	The Deity and All Sufficiency of Christ	Heresy had infiltrated the church... Paul confronted the false teachings with the deity of Jesus Christ.
	Philippians	The Church in Philippi	A Letter of Joy	Thanks for gifts, support, and encouragement in their unity and joy in spite of opposition and threats.
	Philemon	To Philemon (of Colossae)	Concerning a runaway slave	Paul speaks on behalf of Onesimus
Pastoral	1&2 Timothy	Timothy (in Ephesus)	Care of the Church of Ephesus Paul's Final words...	The Ephesus church had become very large; Timothy was in charge of the pastoral care, so these letters were used to encourage and instruct Timothy. An exultant cry of a dying conqueror.
	Titus	Titus (in Crete)	Concerning the Churches of Crete	Paul leaves instruction for running the church.

AUTHOR	LETTER	AUDIENCE	REASON	NOTES
5 GENERAL LETTERS				
Anonymous	Hebrews	A group of Jewish Christians who were separating themselves from the main church and looking for security back in Judaism	Christ, the Mediator of a new Covenant	Stay Faithful even if Persecution comes
James	James	Christian Jews that were scattered among the nations	Christian Wisdom, Good Works, and Pure Religion	James was the brother of Jesus and the leader of the Jerusalem church used to smooth the transition of Judaism to Christianity. Believed to be one of the earliest letters written.
Peter	Peter	Churches in Asia Minor (incl. Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae)	Hope in the midst of suffering Prediction of Apostasy	The church was facing great persecution. Peter was trying to encourage and remind of the suffering Jesus faced. Stay strong until the end.
John	John	The churches of Ephesus 2 and 3 are personal letters	Jesus Is the Son of God If We Belong to Him, We will love one Another Caution against false teachers	Latest letter written. This was written as many of the worldly philosophies had tried to infiltrate the church. Though the letters were personal they still carried great truth.
Jude	Jude	Churches in Asia Minor	Warning against Apostasy	Very similar to 2 Peter... he was a brother to Jesus.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES: Look up the following verses and place the letter of the verse reference on the line before the written out verse. These are a few key passages from the books of the Epistles that can be memorized and used as verses to strengthen your walk... I call the **POWER VERSES**.
*The answers are located following the Scripture references.

A. Romans 1:16	J. 1 Timothy 4:4-5	R. 1 John 4:4
B. 1 Corinthians 1:22-24	K. 2 Timothy 3:16-17	S. 2 John 5-6
C. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15	L. Titus 2:11-14	T. 3 John 2,4
D. Galatians 2:20	M. Philemon 3,25	U. Jude 24-25
E. Ephesians 3:20-21	N. Hebrews 4:12-13	V. Romans 8:38-39
F. Philippians 3:13b-14	O. James 1:5-6	W. 1 Corinthians 15:14
G. Colossians 1:27	P. 1 Peter 1:6-9	X. 2 Corinthians 5:17
H. 1 Thessalonians 3:13	Q. 2 Peter 1:5-7,10	Y. Galatians 5:22-23
I. 2 Thessalonians 1:3		Z. Philippians 4:13

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Week Eight: New Testament Survey *Day Three: Love Letters From God*

1 _____ “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2 _____ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

3 _____ “Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen”

4 _____ “...But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

5 _____ “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.”

6 _____ “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer.”

7 _____ “You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

8 _____ “To Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen”

9 _____ “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”

10 _____ “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

11 _____ “May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones.”

12 _____ “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

13 _____ “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.”

14 _____ “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

15 _____ “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”

16 _____ “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

17 _____ “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”

18 _____ “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

19 “And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to His commands. As you have heard from the beginning, His command is that you walk in love.”

20 “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall...”

21 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

22 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

23 “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

24 “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love everyone of you has for each other is increasing.”

25 “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.”

26 “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trial. These have come so that your faith —of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire —may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

*ANSWERS: 1V, 2X, 3E, 4F, 5N, 6J, 7R, 8U, 9W, 10M, 11H, 12K, 13C, 14B, 15Z, 16Y, 17O, 18T, 19S, 20Q, 21A, 22D, 23G, 24I, 25L, 26P

Dear Beloved,

You are My special child. I have chosen you out of this world to be My own. I know all about you for I created you. I know where you have been and what you have been doing and thinking. I know that no matter what you have done in the past, I have a special plan and purpose for your life. I love you so much that I laid down My life for you. It is My desire that you lay yours down and follow Me full-hearted and fully devoted. I have given you My Spirit to live in and through you, but you often resist Me. I will never harm you, I will never leave you, and I will always love you. You are My special child. Will you love Me?

*Faithfully and Forever,
Your Heavenly Father*

I have known for quite some time that our answers to living for Jesus are found in the letters of the New Testament, but in preparation of this lesson the letters have become more precious and personal. These letters were written for the new churches, but they were also written to us. These letters were penned by the hand of the men that gave their lives for the cause of Christ, but these letters were inspired by God, the Holy Spirit giving the words needed for the people of the day and for everyone that professes Jesus Christ until He returns.

I oftentimes use a journal to write out my prayers to God as a letter to Him as His love letter is revealed to me. Below is space to do that...take time with Him now and connect with the love of your life. Remember no matter how very excited you may be to receive a love letter from your earthly love, God is far more excited to hear from you.

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