

Teachings of the New Testament Letters

A dozen topics that span the Epistles of the New Testament

Dwayne Phillips

November 2025



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

You are free to Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format under the following terms:

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit.

Non-Commercial — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

No Derivatives — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

New English Translation

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from the New English Translation (NET) of the Bible. Sources include <https://bible.org/> and <https://netbible.org/>.

Introduction

An Epistle is a formal, often lengthy, and literary letter written to a specific audience, such as a particular person, church, or group of churches. In the context of the New Testament, the term specifically refers to the 21 books that follow the Book of Acts and precede the Book of Revelation. (from Google)

When reading through the Epistles (Romans through Jude), I would find myself stopping and thinking, “Wait, I read about this topic yesterday or last week in another of these books.” Why it took me so many years to think this is odd, but I finally thought it.

There are teachings or topics that are repeated through the letters that Paul and others wrote to churches of the time. I had another idea, collect the teachings spread across the letters and consider them together. How do the teachings on Faith align and differ from Hebrews, James, and Romans?

This short piece is the result of choosing topics, choosing letters, and commenting. I learned much and also found several other little books to write such as, “Teachings of the Gospels,” “Teachings of Jesus,” “Teachings of the Apostles While With Jesus,” and so on.

Why a Dozen?

Why not? It seemed like a good number. Perhaps two dozen or three dozen would have been better, but one dozen seemed to fit at this time. Maybe next year...

Yes, the dozen topics I chose are pretty good. Yes, there are probably other topics that seem more important to other people. These look pretty good.

ChatGPT

I used this tool in researching topics for this commentary. ChatGPT is a good Bible study tool. There are many good Bible study tools with many being better than ChatGPT. In this day of books written entirely by ChatGPT and the like, I agree with other writers that I should include that the comments on the scriptures herein are all mine. ChatGPT was helpful in research, but I wrote this.

1 Faith

Faith is believing things I cannot measure with scientific instruments or observe with my senses. Faith is believing things I cannot prove. “That is far-fetched and a silly superstition,” are comments from those who demand proof from our physical sciences. Faith, however, is different.

Hebrews 11:1-40

A discussion of faith must begin with Hebrews 11 which is known as the Faith Hall of Fame. This starts with the definition of faith as, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see.” We cannot sense a thing without five senses. We cannot measure that thing with all the measuring devices science has provided. Regardless, we are sure of that. This is illustrated with, “By faith we understand that the worlds were set in order at God’s command, so that the visible has its origin in the invisible.” (v. 3) We didn’t see the worlds created. We do, however, believe they were created at some moment.

The letter to the Hebrews reminds the Hebrews of many of their ancestors who believed in things they did not see and acted on those beliefs. Books are consumed with discussions of each of the ancestors. There are great lessons of faith in each person. This is repeated in James, see below, and many other places in the New Testament Epistles.

The great majority of these ancestors were promised things that they never received. “These all died in faith without receiving the things promised, but they saw them in the distance and welcomed them and acknowledged that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth.” (v. 13) Abraham and his wife Sarah believed they would have a child at an age that made it impossible. That occurred and they saw it. They did not see the many nations God promised and the people that could not be counted. Still, they believed and acted upon their beliefs.

This concept is repeated with, “And these all were commended for their faith, yet they did not receive what was promised.” (v. 39)

James 2:14-26

The writer of the letter of James is traditionally identified as James, the brother of Jesus (also known as James the Just). He is the physical brother of Jesus making him a son of Joseph and Mary. James is a Jew and he writes to Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire.

These Jews were accustomed to working their way to a good standing with God via the laws given in the Old Testament. This concept of “salvation by faith” was in opposition to the concept of “follow the works of the law to be right with God.” Or was it?

James attempts to reconcile this by telling the Jewish audience about famous people from their history who believed by faith and also acted. Abraham believed God and then

he took his son Isaac to the place where he would sacrifice Isaac. James could have written of Moses. Moses believed and then he went to Egypt to bring the people out. Actions always came along with belief. Works always came along with faith.

These writings of James provide a different view of the several writings of Paul about salvation and faith. It is easy to read Paul's descriptions and walk away with, "I have faith. Thanks, God. See you in heaven." James describes an active faith—works that walk along with faith.

Consider a believer and a fellow believer. One is wearing rags while the other is well clothed. If cold weather is coming, does the well-clothed believer tell the other, "Good luck. Hope you don't get too cold." No. Where is the faith in Jesus and heart-felt love? What would Jesus do? What did the apostles do? They blessed, healed, and served. There were works with the faith

Verse 22 summarizes this well with, "You see that his faith was working together with his works and his faith was perfected by works." Faith and works are companions. Works perfects or completes faith.

Romans 3:21-31

In the letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul discusses the concept of salvation at length. There were many Jewish Christians who were still relying on the idea of working and working to achieve salvation from God. Paul attempts to turn these from works to faith.

"Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded! By what principle? Of works? No, but by the principle of faith! For we consider that a person is declared righteous by faith apart from the works of the law." (v. 18 and v. 27)

There is no boasting or achieving salvation through the principle of works. It is the principle of faith. Righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ. We did not see Jesus crucified and raised from the dead. We believed it. We cannot see our sins washed away. We believe they are.

Among the many other discussions of faith in the Epistles are Galatians 2:15-3:9 and Romans 4:1-25.

2 Grace

Grace, what a word with such varied and yet connected meanings. Grace can be elegance or refinement as, "That person walks with such grace." Grace can show a

courteous goodwill as, “he has the grace to admit his debt to her.” Grace can also be a verb, “to grace” as “to honor someone by your presence.” In these definitions, grace is a good thing. Grace in a person is fine and admirable. To grace another person is to show a fine and admirable act.

The grace of God is the ultimate in good, fine, and admirable. The grace of God gives something to all sinners, i.e., all of us, that none of us can earn: salvation. There is an old saying about grace that is true: grace is unmerited favor.

The following passages each convey the concept that we are sinful and saved by the grace of God. Notice, also, that these passages state this grace is for all. It doesn’t matter if we are Jew or Gentile, master or slave, rich or poor, north or south, east or west. It doesn’t matter how we divide ourselves. We are all sinners; we are all saved by the grace of God.

Ephesians 2:1-10

One part of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians emphasizes the mercy of God. The verses begin with the horrid condition of man, “And although you were dead in your offenses and sins ... formerly lived out our lives in the cravings of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind.” (vv. 1-3) We were dead.

Then comes the mercy of God, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us...” (v. 4) And the ultimate statement of grace from God.

“For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (v. 8)

The gift of God comes in light of the weakness of ourselves. This saving has nothing to do with us as it “is not from (our) works” (v. 9) We were dead; we are saved. It is all an unearned and undeserved gift.

Romans 3:21-26

One part of Paul’s letter to the Romans emphasizes the righteousness of God. This is mentioned twice in the first sentence. God’s righteousness is shown through the faith of Jesus.

Paul repeats our failure with, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (v. 23) Then the ultimate statement of grace with, “But they (all of us) are justified freely by

his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (v. 24) Jesus redeemed us or bought us back by paying our debts. Grace saves us. It is free.

Titus 2:11-14

In Paul’s letter to his “genuine son in a common faith” Titus, he emphasizes the guidance of God as it relates to grace. These verses point to the present and future as the grace of God helps us live.

In addition to salvation, the grace of God “trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.” (v. 12) We, sinners, are not alone in our lives. God’s grace trains us how to live.

Jesus “gave himself for us to set us free from every kind of lawlessness and to purify for himself a people who are truly his, who are eager to do good.” (v. 14) We are trained in good works and now we are eager to do these good works.

Salvation comes freely through the grace of God. The desire and knowledge to live today also comes by that grace.

Among the many other discussions of grace in the Epistles are Romans 5:12-21 and 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.

3 Justification and Righteousness

The topic of Justification and Righteousness—God’s judicial declaration of right standing received through faith in Christ rather than human effort—is central to the theology of the New Testament letters. Below are the five most-often cited extended passages (several verses each) in the New Testament epistles (Romans through Jude) that develop this topic in depth. Each includes a brief summary and citation from the New English Translation (NET).

As a person, the goal is righteousness, being righteous, or being declared right in the sight of God. The righteous believer is saved. How then, does the believer achieve righteousness? How then, is the believer justified?

That second question answers itself. The believer is justified by believing, but something in the heart and in the mind. The believer is not justified by working. If I work and work and work overtime, it doesn’t matter. One metaphor is that I cannot work enough and earn enough to buy my ticket to heaven. That “ticket to heaven” comes by faith or believing in something I cannot see.

Then comes the thought of justification. How is the believer justified? Again, by faith or belief. Consider that a family member has an accident at home. I place the person in my car and speed to the hospital. I break all the speed limits. If I come before a judge who reviews my speeding ticket I am (probably) justified because my speeding came from my intent to save a life. My intent, my belief in the healing power of the hospital, justified my actions. My faith in God brings justification or righteousness.

Romans 4:1–25

In the long passage, Paul explains righteousness by faith or belief in what is not seen. Paul is a Jew and refers to Jewish history and the patriarch Abraham. On several well-known-to-Jews occasions, Abraham believed. “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” (v. 4)

This is the opposite of working for pay and earning enough pay to be righteous. For, “one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation.” I work, my employer is obligated to pay me. Such is not righteousness from belief.

Paul extends this message to show that the Gentiles in Rome could be righteous as well as the Jews. Abraham became righteous by belief before the law was written. That was before the time of circumcision as a sign of being one of God’s chosen people. Without the sign of circumcision, Abraham was righteous. In the same way, the Gentiles reading Paul’s letter could be righteous by belief without the sign of circumcision. Belief brings the stamp of approval.

Note that in the New English Translation, the word “justification” and its different forms only appears once—the last word.

Galatians 3:1–14

In the letter to the church at Galatia, Paul delivers the same message, but with different words. In Galatians, half a dozen times Paul contrasts “doing the works” to “believing.” Paul also recalls the history of Abraham for the Jews in Galatia.

In this letter, Paul also refers to “the Spirit” several times. Paul plainly asks, “Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing?” (v. 2) The Spirit equates to being righteous in this context.

Paul also uses “faith” several times. Those who do the works of the law will live by the works of the law. They will not live by faith and cannot claim the justifying power of faith. Finally, we receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.

Philippians 3:4–11

This is a shorter piece of scripture. Paul discusses himself. He was an exemplary Jew. He lived according to the law and the works of the law. He did this better than just about anyone you knew. He received all the awards for abiding by the law.

Paul, however, was righteous, “not because I have my own righteousness derived from the law, but because I have the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is in fact based on Christ’s faithfulness.”

The faith and belief of Jesus Christ justified Paul and made him righteous. All those awards from doing the works of the law meant nothing.

Among the many other discussions of justification and righteous in the Epistles are Romans 3:21-31 and Galatians 2:15-21.

4 Sanctification and Holiness

A couple of definitions are in order as "sanctification" and "holiness" are seldom-used words. To sanctify something is to set it aside for a special purpose. As a child, my father had a pot in which he made popcorn. The pot was oily. My father never cleaned it. The pot was only used to make popcorn. It was set aside for a special purpose, i.e., it was "sanctified."

The word be holy has several meanings. One meaning of holy is something that is separate. To be holy people can simply mean to be placed in a separate or different place. To be holy people can also mean to be different. A “holy kiss” mentioned several times in the New Testament simply means a different kind of kiss or greeting. The Christians were to greet one another in a manner that was different from the usual greeting of the day. They were different people and they should greet one another differently.

Those sanctified are designed for a special purpose — for holy living. They are separated from the evils of the world — holy. The old way of life is gone. There is a new and blessed way of life.

Romans 6:1–23

Should we keep on sinning? Earlier, Paul had written about how the power of God is shown with every sin. God’s grace wipes away every sin. If so, perhaps sinning more

would show God's power more. Makes sense, right? Wrong. The Christian is set aside for a special purpose.

“but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness.” (v. 13) The Christian has a new and different life. It is used for a special purpose—righteousness.

“But now, freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your benefit leading to sanctification, and the end is eternal life.” (v. 22) The Christian is now a slave to God, i.e., the Christian can serve no one other than God. This is a special task assigned to the Christian. Sanctification is mentioned here specifically. There is a new, eternal life ahead.

1 Peter 1:13–25

“You have been born anew, not from perishable but from imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.” (v. 23) The Christian has a new life. This new life comes through the words of God, i.e., God spoke this blessing and this setting aside for a special purpose. The new life is different from the old one. It is holy.

“Like obedient children, do not comply with the evil urges you used to follow in your ignorance” (v. 14) The Christian is a new child. This time a child of God. This is a special place and there is no reason to go back or comply with the old life.

“And if you address as Father the one who impartially judges according to each one's work, live out the time of your temporary residence here in reverence. You know that from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors you were ransomed—not by perishable things like silver or gold” (vv. 17-18) The followers of God are now temporary residents. This is a special designation set aside for special actions. The followers of God were ransomed. Someone evil had kidnapped the people and held them for ransom. God paid that price because the ransomed people were special and set apart.

Hebrews 12:1–14

“Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness, for without it no one will see the Lord.” (v. 14) Living peacefully is a different task. In today's world with national and non-national conflicts in progress, this is quite difficult. It exemplifies holiness and is a life different from the world.

“Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons.” (v. 7) We are sons of God. That is different and set aside. The sons of God live differently and perform different duties. Suffering is one of those duties.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we must get rid of every weight and the sin that clings so closely and run with endurance the race set out for us,” (v. 1) This life has burdens that weigh on us as we try to live in holiness. Whatever the weight on me, I must shed it so that I can be holy and perform the tasks designated for me.

Among the many other discussions of sanctification and holiness in the Epistles are 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8 and Galatians 5:13–26.

5 Love

In the New Testament, there are three general types of love mentioned. The three Greek words (spelling differs in English) are (1) Eros, (2) Phileo, and (3) Agape. Eros is the sexual attraction persons have. Phileo is the family type of love for parents, siblings, and other relations. Agape is a profound type of love that is unconditional and characterized by sacrifice. It is the love that God has for mankind and that God seeks from mankind. Agape is the topic of this concept from the New Testament epistles.

Romans 12:9–21

Paul, writing to the Romans, emphasizes the acts of love by listing verb phrases of action. Examples include abhor evil, cling to good, don’t lag, honor one another, rejoice in hope, endure in suffering, and persist in prayer. The list goes on with several dozen examples.

Love is active; love is good. This culminates with the encouragement to “overcome evil with good.” (v. 21) All the good actions that come from love will overcome evil. Hence, to overcome evil in this sin-filled world, love one another.

1 Corinthians 13:1–13

Paul changes the description of love as he changes from one audience to another. The Christians in Corinth seemed to have problems of division where one group pulled away from another. Groups felt superior and inferior to one another. Unity was suffering.

Performing miracles, possessing knowledge, and even be selfless were nothing if not accompanied and motivated by love in vv. 1-3. To have love in these actions, a Christian needed to understand love.

Paul first describes love with adjectives in a series of “love is” and “love is not” statements. Love is patient and kind. Love is not envious, puffed up, braggadocios, rude, self-serving, unjust, angry, resentful, etc.

Paul next uses verbs or actions like in the scriptures from Romans. Love rejoices in truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, etc.

Love culminates as the greatest of all things. In the end, things come to completion or perfection. At that point, Paul notes the supreme are faith, hope, and love. Love is the greatest of these three. Love it what the Christian should be and do.

1 John 4:7–21

John writes to a nameless group of Christians. He begins with “let us love one another” (v. 7) and ends with the commandment, “the one who loves God should love his fellow Christian.” (v. 21)

John describes love as a place to live. The phrase “resides in” is used in the NET. The phrase “lives in” is in the New International Version. The words “dwell” and “dwellers” are used in the King James Version.

First, John writes that God resides in us in v. 12. That is powerful as in all times, all places, and all situations, God is in me. I am not alone. In vv. 15-16, John further explains this.

God resides in the Christian when the Christian confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—an action by the Christian. The next is that the person who resides in love is also residing in God and has God residing in him. How can I live in a house and also have the house living in me? That explains culture. While I grew up in Louisiana, Louisiana became a part inside of me. Perhaps that example explains it.

Regardless of the example or explanation, God, the Christian, and love are intertwined. When that happens, fear is gone. The summary is the command to love one another.

Among the many other discussions of love in the Epistles are Galatians 5:13–15 and 5:22–23 and Ephesians 4:1–6 and 5:1–2, 21–33.

6 The Gospel of Christ

This is one of those topics that is easier to understand with first defining the terms. Let's begin with "gospel." In general, the word "gospel" means "good news." I can have gospel about last night's football game, "Good news, we won!" Usually, gospel was used for events more significant than last night's football game. The queen gave birth to a son, the next king. That was gospel or significantly good news.

For the past 1700 years or so, "gospel" or "the Gospel" has been reserved for use in Christianity. There is the gospel of Jesus Christ or often just called "the gospel" and understood to be news about Jesus Christ.

Now we come to Jesus Christ. No, "Christ" was not Jesus' last name. At the time of Jesus, he would have been called Jesus of Nazareth or Jesus son of Joseph. How about Jesus Josephson? The British started calling families by their occupation around the year 1100. Joseph, a carpenter, would have taken the name Joseph Carpenter. His son Jesus would have been Jesus Carpenter, and so on.

The word "Christ" is a transliteration of the Latin word Christus which is a transliteration of the Greek word Christos. Christos is a translation of the Hebrew Messiah. Christos and Messiah literally mean "anointed one." The Jews traditionally anointed kings, priests, and prophets. Note, the Jews did not crown their kings, they anointed them with oil.

Therefore, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph, came to be called Jesus the one anointed to take away the sins of the world, i.e., Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus. There are several cases in the New Testament when followers of Jesus told others about Jesus. Things were fine until the word Christ appeared. That triggered great anger from Jewish religious leaders as they abhorred the thought that this Jesus fellow was the anointed one, the Messiah.

Now we have the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the significant good news that Jesus is the one anointed to take away the sins of the world.

1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Paul writes to the church in Corinth. He begins the passage with, "Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel that I preached to you..." (v. 1) Let's make no mistake here. Let's be clear.

Next, we have something “of first importance” or most important of “the gospel.” Here it is, “that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures...” (v. 3)

Ephesians 2:11–22

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians emphasizes the unifying nature of the good news about Jesus the anointed one. Paul begins with, “Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles ... were at that time without the Messiah, alienated...” (v. 11) The Gentiles were on the outside of the Jews, those chosen by God. The Gentiles had no hope. There was a great separation of the Jews and the rest of the world.

The good news is that Jesus changed everything. Read, “For he (Jesus) is our peace, the one who made both groups into one and who destroyed the middle wall of partition” (v. 14)

Notice that the word “peace” appears five times in Ephesians chapter 2. There is no longer enmity between Jew and everyone else. All are one in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:8–14

Back in Ephesians, Paul often used words to “you the Gentiles.” Here in Paul’s second letter to Timothy, we read “I” and “us” many times. I count “I” seven times, “me” two times, and “us” five times.

This is a personal statement about how the good news has affected him. Paul writes, “... but now made visible through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. He has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel!” (v. 10)

Through the good news of the anointed one Jesus, death loses its power. Life is eternal.

Among the many other discussions of the Gospel of Christ in the Epistles are Romans 1:1–6, 14–17 and Galatians 1:6–12 and 2:1–5.

7 Union with Christ or In Christ Identity

Salvation is a gift from the grace of God. That is the good news. Now I am a believer. What happens next? Life in Christ as opposed to life in the world with its worldly philosophy and aspirations.

Romans 6:1–14

Part of these verses in Romans are refuting the idea that we should sin more so that grace will abound. That is short-sighted but logical: with every sin comes forgiveness. Let's show everyone God's forgiveness all the time by sinning all the time. See, no lightning strikes to punish me. Wrong. "...just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may live a new life." (v. 4) There is a new life for the believer.

The logic and fallacies of the former life are dead. "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him." (v. 8) We are alive and live with Christ.

Count the times the word "live" and "alive" occur. They are everywhere. The believer's existence is a vibrant and flourishing one. No boring don't-do-this, don't-do-that life. It is something to live fully.

Ephesians 1:3–14

"And when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)—when you believed in Christ—you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit..." (v. 13)

Our US Department of Agriculture stamps products after inspecting them. This is the USDA stamp of approval. We use "rubber stamping" or putting a sticker on something. In New Testament times, they used a seal where a person would melt wax onto paper and then press their mark on the wax with something called a wax seal stamp that had the person's initials or logo or something that people would recognize. Some meat in the grocery store has a stamp on it saying "USDA Prime" (the really good cuts of meat).

Believers have a stamp on us saying "HOLY SPIRIT Holy Blameless Heirs."

This is from, "For he chose us in Christ ... that we should be holy and blameless before him in love ... his legal heirs through Jesus Christ, according to the pleasure of his will..."

Colossians 2:6–15

I find these statements from Paul's letter to the Colossians as the best descriptions of the believer's life in Christ Jesus. This passage begins with the simple yet powerful exhortation, "...continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." (vv. 6-7)

That is the life the believer should live. That is opposite of the other life, "...not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world..." (v. 8)

The choice is clear: live in Christ Jesus or live in an empty, deceitful philosophy of human traditions.

Life based on human traditions is gone because we have been, "...buried with him (Christ Jesus) in baptism ... raised with him (Christ Jesus) through your faith in the power of God who raised him (Christ Jesus) from the dead." That old life is dead.

This change in life continues with, "And even though you were dead in your transgressions ... he (Christ Jesus) nevertheless made you alive with him (Christ Jesus), having forgiven all your transgressions. He (Christ Jesus) has destroyed what was against us..." (v. 12)

Jesus eliminated the things that would lure us back into the old way of life. Jesus is the new way of life. Let us live it.

Among the many other discussions of life in Christ in the Epistles are Galatians 2:19-21 and Colossians 2:6-15.

8 The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God, often simply called the Spirit, lives in every believer. If a person proclaims Jesus and the Savior and Lord, the Spirit is in them. If a person cannot proclaim such, the Spirit is not in them.

Given the Spirit, a believer has the ability to live a righteous life. In addition, the Spirit provides different believers with different abilities so that the group of believers is able to edify and encourage one another. In essence, the Spirit enables individual believers to be a team, i.e., the church.

Romans 8:1–27

The Spirit creates a new life for the believer, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." (vv. 1-2) Sin ruled the life of a person before becoming a believer in Christ, i.e., a Christian. That is gone. The Spirit gives a life of freedom. The believers now, "do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (v. 4)

The next few verses repeatedly stress that the Holy Spirit lives in the believer. This is a total immersion. This becomes the life of the believer which is now righteous.

The passage concludes with, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God... by whom we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself bears witness to our spirit that we are God’s children. And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ) ...” (vv. 15-17)

Led by the Holy Spirit, the believer is a child of God. The believer is fully adopted by God to become an heir just as Jesus Christ is a child and an heir.

Further, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how we should pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings.” (v. 26) The Spirit is a helper.

1 Corinthians 12:1–13

Romans 8:26 states that the Holy Spirit is a helper. That concept is amplified here in the letter to Corinth. The Spirit provides what is needed in gifts of abilities with different gifts given to different believers. This is summarized by, “Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit.” (v. 4)

These gifts are not distributed randomly, but with a purpose of strengthening the whole body of believers. This is stated as, “To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all.” (v. 7)

Through the Spirit, all the different believers with different abilities are brought together in one body. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” (v. 13) It doesn’t matter how a person would divide the believers—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—there is now one body.

Ephesians 3:14-19

This passage concentrates on one ability given by the Spirit. It appears that this ability is given to every believer. That is the ability to know Jesus Christ. “I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he will grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, that Christ will dwell in your hearts through faith...” (v. 116-17)

With the Spirit living in the heart of the believer, the believer will, “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you will be filled up to all the fullness of God.” (v. 19)

Among the many other discussions of the Holy Spirit in the Epistles are Galatians 5:16-17 and Titus 3:3-7.

9 Sin

Sin is the rebellion of man against God. Instead of doing what God decrees is right, i.e. righteousness, mankind does otherwise. Sin, therefore, separates us from God. Some mistakenly believe that being apart from God is liberating. Instead, mankind finds that sin brings all sorts of troubles.

Romans 1:18–32 and 3:9–20

Paul writes this description of sin and its consequences to the Christians in Rome. The core message is in verse 18 and verse 32:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness...” (v. 18)

Mankind suppresses the truth of God by ignoring what God decrees is right (righteousness) and wrong.

“Although they fully know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but also approve of those who practice them.” (v. 32)

Mankind knows that sinning brings death. This is fully known by the decrees of God, but mankind ignores that. And not only do we sin, but we also approve of those who sin with us.

Paul explains that man knows God the creator. Of course we do as how else would everything be here? God is self-evident. Man, however, ignores God and the divine creator. Man responded with futile thoughts and dark hearts of stone.

God allows man to go our own sinful way. The verses list the sinful actions that man chooses over the righteous ways of God. The list isn’t pretty. It is, however, what comes to man when ignoring God’s ways.

There is a penalty of sin, “and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.” (v. 27)

Galatians 5:16–21

Paul continues the message about sin to the Christians in Galatia. Instead of sinning, Paul recommends, “But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.” (v. 16)

There is life led by the Spirit of God, and there is life led by the desires of the flesh. These are opposites with no middle ground. Mankind has sought that middle ground for so long that we declare the nonexistent to exist.

Paul goes on to list some of the sins of the flesh. These are obvious acts. These sinful acts bring a consequence, “Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!” (v. 21)

Romans 5:12–21

This goes back to Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome. How did we reach this point? Sin entered the world through one man: Adam, the first man. This was the fall of mankind that brought all these problems and punishment.

We, however, are not stuck in this bad state. “For if, by the transgression of the one man, death reigned through the one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ! ... through the one righteous act came righteousness leading to life for all people.” (vv. 17-18)

We are saved; we have salvation. This is through the one righteous act and the gift of grace. Sin is available, but so is salvation. It is our choice.

Among the many other discussions of sin in the Epistles are Ephesians 2:1-3 and James 1:13-15.

10 Redemption and Salvation

Several definitions are in order before beginning:

Redeem: gain or regain possession of something in exchange for payment.

Reconcile: bring two or more people back into a state of agreement or friendship after a dispute.

Ransom: a sum of money or other payment demanded or paid for the release of a prisoner or hostage

Salvation: the state of being saved.

The concept expressed in the New Testament letters is that we did not have salvation—we were lost and separated from God. God, however, redeemed us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That sacrifice reconciled us to God or brought us back together after sin separated mankind from God. Sin held us hostage, but Jesus Christ was given as the ransom to set us free.

Romans 5:1–11

We used to live in sin. Now, we are right with God. We have been declared, in verse 1, “righteous by faith” and “we have peace with God.” Verse 2 continues with, “we rejoice in ... God’s glory.” Salvation via redemption—that is the gift of grace.

We were ungodly sinners. While in this miserable state, Jesus Christ died for us. Paul emphasizes that it is one thing to die for a worthy and worthwhile person, but Jesus died for worthless people. That magnifies the gift.

And we were helpless. Simply put, we could do nothing to help ourselves.

Hebrews 9:11–28

This passage is sent to the Hebrews, i.e., the Jews. It is full of Jewish concepts and Jewish examples. Jesus comes to man as a High Priest through the tent or the Tabernacle. Jesus entered the most Holy place in the Tabernacle. While human High Priests entered there once a year after the sacrifice of goats and calves, Jesus enters by His own sacrifice.

The writer uses old language to describe old practices of an annual redemption from sin. There is blood everywhere from the animal sacrifices that were repeated countless times.

The old is gone, and we have a new redemption. The blood of Jesus was shed, blood still necessary, but it was shed once for all time. “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many...” (v. 28)

A one-time blood sacrifice of one Jesus redeemed all for all time. That is the redemptive gift of grace bringing salvation.

1 Peter 1:3–9, 18–21

Peter expresses many of the same thoughts as he writes to various Christians. Many of those Christians are Hebrews or Jews and share the same lives as the Jewish Christians in the letter to the Hebrews.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ redeemed us to salvation. This salvation is a new birth, a new life that brings hope into, “an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you...” (v. 4)

“This brings you great joy, although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials.” (v. 6) These are the types of trials also mentioned earlier in Romans chapter 5.

The end of Peter’s writing here shows that we were captives held for ransom. The precious blood of Jesus was paid as that ransom or the price of redemption. We are no longer held captive. We are free to live with our faith and hope in God.

Among the many other discussions of redemption and salvation in the Epistles are Ephesians 2:1-10 and Titus 3:3-7.

11 Resurrection and Future Hope

Perhaps the greatest miracle of history was the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ. Unjustifiably arrested and executed, Jesus rose from the dead three days later to free mankind from the burden of sin. The future is filled with hope. In addition, the New Testament Epistles record the future resurrection of those believers who physically die before the return of Jesus Christ. Those who have died are not to be mourned as they will rise and meet Jesus Christ before those who are still living on earth. These resurrections bring hope of today and tomorrow.

1 Peter 1:3–9

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (v. 3)

This is the introduction and summary of the topic. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, i.e., the rising from the dead of Jesus, brings the believers into a living hope. The future, free from the punishment of sin, is much better than the past.

The believers come into a life that is, “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” (v. 4)

“This brings you great joy” (v. 6)

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

“Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope.” (v. 13)

So begins Paul's description of the resurrection of believers in his letter to the Thessalonians. There was a mistaken belief among the people of the time that a believer had to be alive physically to join with Jesus Christ at the second coming. Dying before the second coming meant no hope.

Paul corrects this plainly so that the Thessalonians would not be uninformed. Jesus Christ will come down from the heavens in sight of all, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” (v. 16)

After those who have died are resurrected, those who are alive will join Jesus Christ and the resurrected in the air as Paul describes, “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” (v. 17)

1 Corinthians 15:1–58

Paul devotes a long chapter in the first letter to the Corinthians to describe the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and how that brings hope for the future.

First is the miracle, “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures,” (vv. 3-4)

Next is the future hope, “by which you are being saved” (v. 2)

While simple, just a couple of sentences, this is a profound mystery. Paul writes on and on about how the resurrection of Jesus Christ is necessary for the future hope. With no death, there is no resurrection. With no resurrection, there is no hope. If belief stops anywhere in the chain of events, nothing has any meaning.

All these past events and future hope mean death is dead, “The last enemy to be eliminated is death.” (v. 26)

Continuing the chain of events is the resurrection of the believers who have died, “it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;” (v. 43) The eternal resurrection of the believer eliminated death. The future is much greater than the past and present.

There is the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ over sin and the blessings to the believers, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (vv. 56-57)

Among the many other discussions of resurrection and future hope in the Epistles are Romans 6:4-11 and 2 Corinthians 4:14-5:10.

12 Obedience of Faith

Faith is believing in something that I cannot sense by sight, touch, etc. Obedience is acting in a way that obeys what someone tells me is right. It is one thing to believe. It is another thing to act.

(For context, “faith” here means a belief in the divine origin and life of Jesus Christ as the Son of God sent to earth to take away our sins. Obedience is obeying the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments.)

To complicate the matter, we have the word “works” and a history of Christianity that says you have to work or live right or be damned. Interpretations differ on these words, and which is more important. It is not satisfying to many people to say that both faith and work are important. Some people simply want to choose one over the other. I don’t believe the choice is necessary.

James 1:22-25 and 2:14–26

A familiar scripture is, “So also faith, if it does not have works, is dead being by itself.” (ch. 2 v. 17) This is commonly known as “faith without works is dead.” This passage is criticized to the point that some believe the entire letter from James should not be in the Bible. That belief stems from centuries of an emphasis on working your way to heaven. Working your way to heaven is mistaken belief as the prior teachings in the Epistles have shown.

James provides encouragement to live obediently with several mentions of “live it out” in the first chapter (v. 23 and v. 25). Live a life of faith with “live” being an active verb and the life being something that others can see.

Perhaps that is the crux of the matter as others cannot see what I believe. Others can see me living obediently or working for Jesus Christ. And then, others cannot see my belief that these works are not attempts to earn my way to salvation but merely a show of the love and faith I have.

Galatians 5:5-6 and 5:13–26

Paul addresses the Galatians with the simple statement, “the only thing that matters is faith working through love.” (v. 6) This combines faith and working into one concept that is caused and reflected in love for Jesus Christ and our fellow man.

Paul continues to teach on this matter using the words “live” and “Spirit” for works and faith. “But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.” (v. 16). He contrasts living by the spirit or working through faith in Jesus Christ with the works of the flesh. The works of the flesh are in opposition to the works of faith.

Paul lists the “works of the flesh” in vv. 19-21. Paul then lists the fruits of the Spirit or works of faith in vv. 22-26. Paul emphasizes that these are obvious as anyone can contrast love, joy, and peace against impurity, depravity, and hostilities.

Obedience born of faith is simple once considering these lists from Paul to the Galatians.

Hebrews 3:7–19

The writer to the Hebrews uses the ideas of listening and taking to heart what should be believed by faith. The writer chides the Hebrews with references to their ancestors who often rebelled against God while traveling from Egypt to the land promised to them. “Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of testing in the wilderness.” (v. 8)

Further, “For which ones heard and rebelled?” (v. 16) Most of the people heard, had some faith in what they were hearing, but instead rebelled instead of obeyed. Their actions or works were opposite of their faith.

Among the many other discussions of obedience of faith in the Epistles are Romans 1:1–7, 15:14–21, 16:25–27 and 1 Peter 1:13–2:3.