



Word ALIVE

Part 36: Prisoner of Love



Background Notes ▾

PURPOSE: To present Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians.

AUTHOR: Paul, the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

DATE: Paul is writing from his captivity in Rome (ca 60-61).

STYLE: Paul takes his gospel to cosmic proportions in these letters, far more abstract than his earlier ones. Colossians transcends the purely human aspect of Christ and his Church, and takes on the Christian mystique, with Christ as the head of the universe and the Church as a true moral person. Ephesians takes up the same themes, perhaps a bit more subdued, but presents us with perhaps the strongest ecumenical letter of Paul's, insisting on the unity of all Christians in Christ.



Opening Quotes

“God chose us in Christ before the world began, to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love.” Eph 1:3

“When you heard the glad tidings of salvation... and believed in it, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit, the first payment against a full redemption.” Eph 1:13

“By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared for us.” Eph 2:8-10

“You will be able to grasp fully... the experience of Christ's love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God himself.” Eph 3:18

“There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” Eph 4:5

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Eph 5:21

“He is the image of the invisible God...everything in heaven and on earth were created through him, and for him.” Col 1:15

“In my own flesh I fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church.” Col 1:24

“He cancelled the bond that stood against us... nailing it to the cross.” Col 2:14

the BIG PICTURE			
► : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets			
12 Periods ▾		Plot ▾	Other books related to period ▾
BC	❶ THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104
1850	❷ THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50	
1250	❸ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX	Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus
1200	❹ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua
1100	❺ THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth
1030	❻ KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov
1000	❼ THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,
721 587	❽ BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar
538	❾ THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Babylonians, “major” prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)
163 63	❿ THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Cyrus, 2 nd temple, 2 nd Law, “minor” prophets, new writings
AD	❾+ JESUS CHRIST	LK	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes)
33 70	❿ APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection
			Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ



The Story of Part 36: Prisoner of Love

When looking for the Supreme Cause of the universe, “chance” falls rather short on credibility to the man of faith. We are not born to die. God will gather all his people and bring them under Christ’s headship as one body, animated by the Holy Spirit, called to everlasting joy in the Father’s house. Paul places Christ as King of the Universe in his letters to the Christians in Colossae and Ephesus from his jail cell in Rome. The Church was plagued by a heresy combining the Judaizing influence with gnosticism (“gnosis” means “secret knowledge”) which purported to receive from Jesus the secret teaching that material universe was evil. Paul correspondingly put the King of Kings at the head of the universe as per God’s plan. The universe was not evil, but a creation of God, a creation gone wrong because of sin, not because it had a power rivaling God’s. But this broken universe was only a temporary situation. Even life itself is a passage to a person’s eternal destiny. As for Christ, he was not merely an “enlightened being” as Gnosticism taught. Even non-believing religions today categorize him as a “good man”, a “great prophet”, or a genius “moral teacher”, but certainly not God. Paul confronts this popular view with the conviction of a man called by Christ himself. Christ is nothing short of the absolute master of the universe, raised by God, seated above every principality, power, virtue, and domination. The mere name of Jesus is above every name, says Paul, in his or any other age.

When we were dead in sin, said Paul, God, out of sheer love, brought us to life with Christ. Salvation is a free gift that we do not earn through good works. On the contrary, we do good works because they have been assigned by God for us to walk in. Again, we do good works *because* we are saved, not *in order* to be saved. This freedom of the children of God was bought for us at the great price of Jesus’ blood on the cross. In his own flesh he abolished the law with its commands and precepts, reconciling man with his fellow man and with his Creator. This is no “great moral teacher”! He bridges the otherwise uncrossable abyss between God and man which resulted from man’s rebellion.

Paul reveals God’s secret plan: In Christ Jesus, the Gentiles are now co-heirs with the Jews! They are members of the same body and sharers of the promise. Today Jews, Muslims, and other believers in the one God do not comprehend that God can be three persons in his essence, for it appears to violate the very heart of monotheism. But having experienced Christ and the Holy Spirit, it becomes clear that God is Love, and Love cannot happen without Someone to Love. For God to be Love, and to have been Love eternally, there must have always been Someone loved in God. God, in a mysterious way, resembles more a family than a lone ruler. The intense love between Father and Son in God is so intense that it is actually a Person in God, the Holy

Spirit. Paul tells the Ephesians that he kneels before the Father “from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.” We do not reflect our social structures onto God. On the contrary, our social structures are but a pale reflection of our Creator who is Love. The experience of Christ’s love, Paul tells us, surpasses all knowledge.

Do we realize, in fact, that the original sin was a giving in to the temptation to be like God, but that salvation from this leads us to an eternal destiny in Christ where we actually attain the fullness of God?! Driven by this revelation, Paul is a prisoner for the Lord, urging unity in Christ. In fact, there is only one faith and one baptism in Christ, which means there exists still a unity amongst all true believers, in spite of the sad external divisions which exist today.

Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with practical advice on avoiding bitterness and anger, and instead being compassionate and forgiving. But more important is the *way* to do this: by putting on Christ, literally imitating God as his dear children. He then addresses the proper relationship between husbands and wives, a controversial passage which exhorts wives to submit themselves to their husbands. A simple reading of the verses preceding and following that verse should make it obvious that Paul is using terms appropriate to his day and age to teach a *mutual* submission to each other out of reverence for Christ. Marriage itself, in fact, is a model of the relationship between God and us, Christ and his Church.

The Colossians also had the gnostic philosophy of a divine energy (“the Plenitude”) diffusing itself through angels, men, and matter. Jesus was one of these in their teachings. Paul sternly corrected them, in terms they could understand. Because of the fact that he rose from the dead, he was no mere angel or “enlightened” teacher. He was no less than the firstborn of the dead, the firstborn of all renewed creation. Through him God reconciled everything, making peace through the blood of the cross. And peace not just with man, but with all of creation, a creation that is not evil in itself, but that has gone awry with the *intrusion* of evil.

Being imprisoned was of little importance to Paul, since he considered that his sufferings in inactivity contributed just as much to the building up of the Church as his preaching. He truly lived the communion of saints. We, too, are called to join our suffering to the cross, because that’s where the guilt of our sins has been nailed permanently! We are to literally put off the old self and put on Christ, our completeness.

Paul finishes with family matters, telling spouses, parents, and children to love each other as their duty in the Lord. Love, over all virtues, binds the rest together and makes them perfect. ☺



Defending the Faith: Following the Herd

"There is no absolute morality. Every decision we make is the product of cultural conditioning."

The problem with denying absolute morality is that it destroys the foundation for calling anything truly good or evil. If Hitler was evil, it was only "relatively speaking." Osama bin Laden? "Sort of." Proponents of relative morality believe there is no absolute truth (and therefore no absolute morality). The assertion, of course, refutes itself. If there is no absolute truth, then the statement "there is no absolute truth" cannot be absolutely true. Therefore, there must be absolute truth!

Why, then, do people deny absolute truth or absolute morality? One reason given is the inconsistencies amongst cultures and religions. But an honest look at cultures and religions across space and time will reveal a striking *similarity* in ethics. This ethical common ground has even led many to see religions as just variations of the Golden Rule "love your neighbor as yourself." Why has *no* society promoted selfishness, un-cooperation and disloyalty? Post-modernists tell us that this is simply human self-preservation. Nietzsche said that morality is nothing more than man's "herd instinct." Marx called religion the "opiate of the masses." Yet atheistic Communism has utterly failed to protect humanity.

Relativism can also lead to nihilism. If there is no absolute morality, then laws are decided on the whim of rulers, themselves not necessarily guided by true morality, hence the oppressive dictators of history – "might makes right." Some would suggest that an absolute God giving a moral law would simply be another case of "might makes right."

Paul concedes that yes, God *is* the Almighty behind the innate moral law that we feel. Just as color-blind

people don't disprove the existence of colors, "absolute-morality-blind" people do not disprove absolute morality! This is why even pagans can do what the Law requires, following their conscience. God may even excuse them of their errors (Rom 2:14-16). This truth puts a serious kink in the "herd instinct" theory. How can pagans have a good, even if uninformed, conscience, when they have not even been given the Law? It is because truth is truth. God speaks to everyone. Christians do not have a monopoly on the truth. What Christians *do* have the corner on is how God's justice and *grace* coexist.

When Christ said he came to heal the sick, not "the righteous," he was speaking facetiously of those who considered themselves perfectly righteous. We are all sick, but not all of us have accepted it, either out of pride, or an ignorance which may or may not be excused (see also CCC 1260), when God judges the world. But with the bad news of our brokenness is the Good News of our *free* redemption in Christ.

So if Almighty God really is a case of "might makes right", then let us acknowledge His, and only His, absolute supremacy, and believe that He raised His Son from the dead. Those who belong to Him hear His voice (Jn 10:16). Herd instinct? Flock instinct! We follow not the animal whims of our own will, but the divine will of the Good Shepherd! Without the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:19), we run the risk of the self-destructive philosophy that says "there is no absolute morality," the same foolishness that says, "There is no God" (Psalm 14).



Expressing the Faith: Awesome God

Rich Mullins puts God in His place.

*When He rolls up His sleeves He ain't just putting on the ritz
Our God is an awesome God
There's thunder in His footsteps and lightning in His fists
Our God is an awesome God
And the Lord wasn't joking when He kicked 'em out of Eden
It wasn't for no reason that He shed His blood
His return is very close and so you better be believing
that our God is an awesome God*

**Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom, power, and love
Our God is an awesome God**
(repeat)

*And when the sky was starless in the void of the night
Our God is an awesome God
He spoke into the darkness and created the light
Our God is an awesome God
Judgement and wrath He poured out on Sodom
Mercy and grace He gave us at the cross
I hope that we have not too quickly forgotten
that our God is an awesome God*

**Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from heaven above
With wisdom, power, and love
Our God is an awesome God**
(repeat)

❖ **Next time: "A Few Good Men"** ❖