

The Prophecy Series: The Epistles

1 – CONCERNING THE RESURRECTION (1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58)

I. The Nature of the New Testament Epistles

A. The Epistles (Letters)

- The epistles can be divided into two groups: The Letters of Paul and The General Letters.

B. Characteristics of the Epistles

- The epistles are not consistent and uniform.

When studying the epistles, it must be recognized that each epistle differs in its purpose. Some of the epistles were personal letters that were not written for the public. They were intended for the person or persons to whom they were addressed. Philemon is an example of a personal letter that was written by the apostle Paul. Other epistles were written for the purpose of public reading in the churches such as 1 John and Hebrews. The epistles to the Romans and Philemon differ from one another not only in content but also to the degree that one is far more personal than the other.

- The epistles were intended for a specific occasion.

The epistles do have one common factor that must be considered when reading and interpreting them. The epistles are occasional documents in that they were written because of a specific situation during the first century after the Resurrection. Even though they are inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus belong to all time, they were written out of the context of the writer to the context of the original recipients. This can create a problem for the student as he has difficulty in interpreting the epistles in his cultural context.

- The occasion of the epistle must be taken seriously.

The epistles require that the reader have an understanding of the occasion for which they were written. Almost all of the epistles in the New Testament were in response to a specific occasion or issue. The occasions for the letters include behavior that needed correcting, doctrinal error that needed to be set right, or a misunderstanding that needed to be explained further. Most of the problems we have in studying the epistles emerge from the fact that we have the answers, but we do not necessarily know or understand the questions or problems that are being addressed.

- The epistles are not necessarily theological treatises.

It must be recognized by the student that the epistles are first of all not theological treatises. There is theology implied in the epistles, but it is often theology that was written for an issue that was at hand during the time it was written. While one can go to the epistles for theology, it must be kept in mind that they were not written to expound Christian theology. It is always theology written for a particular need.

C. Basic Rules for the Epistles

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- The text cannot mean what the verses never meant to its author or original readers.

The student must spend time prayerfully considering what the meaning for the scriptural text was for the reader in the first century. This guideline does not necessarily help the student find what the scriptural text means, but it does help set the limits as to what it cannot mean.

- Where we share similar life situations with the first century church, God's word is the same for us.

This rule directs the student to take most of the theological sections and community-directed commands and apply them to his cultural context.

II. Concerning the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

A. The Question Concerning the Spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:50)

- Paul makes a statement concerning who will inherit the kingdom.
- The earthly cannot inherit the spiritual.

B. The Mystery of the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

1. The Change (1 Corinthians 15:51)

- Those believers, who are alive, will be changed.

2. The Timing (1 Corinthians 15:52)

- It will occur instantaneously when Jesus returns for the church.

C. The Perishable Becomes Imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:53-55)

1. The Coming of Immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53)

- Mortal man must put on immortality.

2. The Victory Over Death (1 Corinthians 15:54-55)

- This immortality removes the victory from death and the grave.

D. The Victory Through Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:56-57)

1. The Empowerment of Death (1 Corinthians 15:56)

- Death receives its power from sin, which is empowered by the Law.

2. The Source of Victory (1 Corinthians 15:57)

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- God has given us the victory through Jesus Christ.

E. The Exhortation (1 Corinthians 15:58)

- Because of this hope, we must remain steadfast in our service to the Lord.