

347: Oct. 13, 20. Challenge and be Challenged by (New Testament Weeks 41-42)

10/6: General Conference

10/13: Ephesians

10/20: Philipians; Colossians

Good timing for these books with Conference coming up!

Reading we will have covered since last Sunday School:

2 Cor. 8-13; Galatians; Philipians; Colossians; Ephesians.

Sunday School:

1. Open up time for class to share their feelings and questions, so they can help guide the time
2. Key highlights from the reading:
 - a. 2 Cor: Strength in Weakness
 - b. Galatians
 - i. Different approaches to the gospel, differences among members (sensitivity to this is one of the driving motivations for this podcast. We not only need different things; we need mutually exclusive things)
 - ii. Fruits of the Spirit (discussion of how we can cultivate the Spirit and what fruits we see in our lives) 5:22-25: For the fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
 - c. Philipians
 - i. Note all the references to JOY!
 - ii. 2:12-13: Such a good description of the balance of work and grace: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For God is at work in you, bringing out both the desire and effort to do his will"
 - iii. 4:4-8 (concentrated principles!): Rejoice in the Lord always, and I say again, rejoice. Let your kindness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in all things let your requests be known to God by means of prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus. 8Finally, beloved, whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, if something is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things.
 - iv. Hymn of condescension: 2:6-11

- v. 4:13 “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (need, abundance, contentment)
- d. Colossians
 - i. 3: Put to death the old self. **3:9-16**.
- e. Ephesians
 - i. Armor of God (6:10-17) One of the very easiest scriptural analogies to illustrate and discuss. I remember doodling it at the MTC. truth (belt); righteousness (breastplate); preparation for the gospel of peace (shoes); faith (shield); salvation (helmet); Spirit/word of God (sword).
 - ii. Proper order in the Church, family, and society
- 3. Discussion points
 - a. Proper social relationships
 - i. In the home (proclamation on the family, increasing understanding of developmental psychology, role of children, etc)
 - ii. At church (Pres. Nelson’s emphasis on global Church, different resources and challenges in different congregations, incredible structure, organization, effectiveness)
 - iii. In wider society (social norms in different cultures, individual vs. group, men vs. women, racism, etc). These principles are DEEP DEEP in our “natural human” way of thinking, and this reading challenges us to acknowledge and transcend it, while reflecting its own historical and cultural complexity
 - b. Diversity and unity
 - c. Theology of church and scripture “Challenge and be challenged by”
- 4. Conclusion

(Paul’s letters are organized from longest to shortest, if you were wondering. 1-2 Timothy and Titus were added on after)

Purpose of Colossians:

The reason for writing this letter is related to a growing schism or heresy that had taken root among the community. The number of saints involved in the faction remains an unanswerable question, but it is clear that some had become concerned with esoteric teachings (2: 8– 18), angel worship (2: 18), and asceticism (2: 20– 23). Those who promoted such ideals are sometimes referred to as “Gnostics,” a later movement that did emphasize the worship of angelic intermediaries, private or mystical knowledge, and the concept of physically rigorous spirituality. Today, scholars tend not to describe the movement in Colossae as a form of early Gnosticism and the heresy as different from the problems faced in the other Pauline branches of the church. The problem might be described as an emphasis on wisdom and personal spirituality, and Paul does associate the movement with Jewish ideas (2: 13, 16). Paul countered the ideas of those who were troubling the branch with a declaration of what he defined as true spirituality (3: 5– 10) and what amounts to a declaration of the nature or essence of Christ (1: 16– 18). This declaration is founded upon an early Christian hymn, the author of

which remains unknown, but whom Paul quoted in the service of teaching about Christ and his eternal nature. The letter concludes with a long list of Pauline associates and friends (4: 7– 18), including well-known individuals such as Mark, Onesimus, and Luke. Furthermore, Paul encouraged the communities at Laodicea and Colossae to exchange letters (4: 16). The letter to the Laodiceans is now lost unless it is the same as the letter to the Ephesians (see note on Ephesians 1: 1).

Wayment, Thomas A.. *The New Testament: A New Translation for Latter-day Saints* (Kindle Locations 13255-13258). Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book. Kindle Edition.

Purpose of Ephesians:

In the letter Paul consistently returns to the theme of the riches of Christ, encouraging the saints in Ephesus to “put on the new person, which was created in the image of God in righteousness and holiness of truth” (4: 24). The letter contains few quotations or allusions to the Old Testament, confirming that the recipients were Gentiles who sought a new existence in Christ apart from the law of Moses. Paul frequently draws upon the language of redemption and inheritance, suggesting that the letter was seen as a means of encouraging a community to stand firm in faith. There are some concerns expressed in the letter (5: 3– 21), but the tone of the letter is not one of concern for a major schism in the branch but rather a general tone of counsel to live a new life in Christ. It is unclear how Paul’s statements regarding his troubles in Asia are reflected in this letter, but at one point he wrote to the saints in Corinth concerning a trial that was so severe that he thought he would perhaps die as a result: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of our trial which came upon us in Asia, that we were weighed down tremendously, so that we despaired even for life itself. But we felt we had a sentence of death passed upon us” (2 Corinthians 1: 8– 9). That trial most likely took place in Ephesus given the amount of time that Paul spent in the city. The letter to the saints is, however, mostly positive, suggesting that this trial did not damage his relationship with the saints or darken his feelings toward the community there.

Household Codes

BOX 25.3 The “Household Rules” in Colossians and Ephesians

Two of the most complete sets of “household rules” (the technical German name is *Haustafeln*) in the New Testament can be found in Col 3:18–4:1 and Eph 5:21–6:9 (see also 1 Pet 2:13–3:12). These rules are concerned with reciprocal duties in social arrangements that involve one person having power over another: (a) wives and husbands, (b) children and fathers, (c) slaves and masters. Given the circumstance that both of these letters claim to be written by Paul, it is interesting to note that Paul himself never gives such set rules. Is that because he, like Jesus, did not expect social relations to last much longer, since the end of the age was imminent?

Scholars continue to debate why such rules for the household came to be emphasized by the second generation of Christianity. The following are among the more interesting theories: (a) since Christians stopped believing that the end was coming right away, they needed to devise better rules for how they could continue to function in their social arrangements with one another; (b) some Christians

were claiming that all people had an equal standing in Christ (see Gal 3:28) and had begun to urge a radical egalitarian form of community, in which no one had precedence over anyone else (i.e., men and women / slaves and masters were all on equal footing); the household rules were intended to put a halt to this way of thinking; (c) Christians began to experience severe persecution from those who were outside, and needed to formulate stronger social bonds with one another, so as to provide a more cohesive front with which to withstand the barrage of persecution; (d) Christians had been accused of social improprieties (see box 21.2) and needed to demonstrate to the world that they were socially respectable and free from any radical tendencies.

These options are not, of course, mutually exclusive; the real solution may be a combination of several, or all, of them. What is clear, however, is that each explanation makes best sense if the Christian church had already been around for a while and anticipated having to function in society over the long haul.

Proper Relationships

What is the best way to interact with each other? The fundamental social contract is that we mediate our own desires to work better as a group. Every relationship and every society needs to balance out the needs and wants of the individual and the needs and wants of the group. In general, liberal groups are more “fair” and conservative groups get more done (Jonathan Haidt’s research is phenomenal on this) He points out that liberals are concerned about harm and fairness, while conservatives are also concerned with loyalty, authority, and purity.

Social scripts and norms make up our inherited wisdom. The first thing that struck me in graduate school is that all religion and all revelation is culturally situated. This is why each of us needs to figure life out. This is why we need to “challenge and be challenged by” our sources of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance. (which side of 1978 are we on? Question that has helped me. And President Nelson has told us to fasten our seatbelts, so we’ll see what continues to be shared)

New Testament Authorship

Ok, it’s time to really dig into authorship and the New Testament. We’ve talked about the diversity of Early Christianity... not only is that diversity very apparent in the New Testament when you know what to look for, but there are some sneaky moves at play. We’ve also talked about what a controversial figure is, and how he struggled with different groups of Christians.

Well, it is quite clear that after his death other Christians wrote in his name, some because they agreed with him, and some in order to use his own name argue positions he was against!!

Remember that the balance between Church and scriptural authority was at the root of the Protestant Reformation or as the Catholics call it, "The Great Schism". This is why the motto of the podcast is "challenge and be challenged by the scriptures". It is up to us each to find that balance of the Spirit and intuition, our relationship to scripture, and our relationship to the Church and its members.

Here's a quick and dirty guide to NT authorship that we have gone through before:

NT authorship comes in four flavors:

Genuine. Actually written by who it says it was.

Anonymous. Makes no authorial claims; attribution comes later.

Forged. Claims but be written by someone famous but it probably isn't so.

Homonymous. Has the same name as someone famous. So written by who it claims to be, but not who we think it is.

Matthew: Anonymous, Jewish Christian, almost certainly not Matthew though perhaps Matthew wrote a source used by the evangelist.

Mark: Anonymous, but likely written by someone named Mark because later Christians tried to link it to Peter. If people didn't already know Mark wrote it, they would have succeeded.

Luke: Anonymous. Same author as Acts. Not an eyewitness but used eyewitness sources. Likely not Luke, though has the highest chance of being correctly attributed, though that chance still remains low (besides Mark, but we don't know which Mark)

John: Anonymous. Almost certainly not written by John. Not written by the same person who wrote the letters of John or Revelation.

Acts. Anonymous, same author as the gospel of Luke.

Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon. All scholars agree Paul wrote these as they claim to be written.

Ephesians: Forged, claims to be by Paul. Dependent on Colossians.

Colossians: Forged, claims to be by Paul.

2 Thessalonians. Claims to be by Paul, most likely forged. (see 2 Thess. 3:17, designed to seem legitimate but demonstrably false)

1 Timothy, Titus. Forged in the name of Paul. Titus is dependent on 1 Tim.

2 Timothy. Probably forged, but either by someone close to Paul with some historical knowledge, or possibly written by Paul.

Hebrews. Anonymous, not written by Paul. Written by someone with better Greek, different beliefs, and a closer relationship to Jewish Christianity.

James. Most likely forged, possibly written by a James who was not Jesus' brother (he never claims to be)

1 Peter. Forged in the name of Peter.

2 Peter. Definitely forged in the name of Peter, our latest book of the NT composed around 130. Dependent on Jude.

1 John. Anonymous, written by someone in the same community as but different from the author of the fourth gospel.

2-3 John. Written by the "Presbyter". Possibly the author of 1 John as well.

Jude. Mostly likely forged.

Revelation. Written by someone named John, but not the apostle.

Now, I'm sure some of you may have a negative gut reaction to this idea. I think our theology of scripture gives us powerful resources though. Even a surface read of the Book of Mormon shows how very self-aware concerning its complex composition. Then we understand how the English of the Book of Mormon fits in and we have even more to work with. Then there is the Book of Abraham... Scripture is inspired and inspiring, and I am convinced we can FIRST understand the nature of scripture historically, and THEN make theological conclusions.