



Front Cover

THE MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

What is the message of the New Testament? Is it possible to take the entire New Testament and summarize its basic message? If you will continue to read, you will see that we can do just that. I believe you are going to enjoy this study immensely. It is the message of the New Testament, in which I will summarize all twenty-seven books. You will find that the message of the New Testament revolves around Jesus Christ.

The message of the New Testament, in twenty-seven stanzas, Matthew through Revelation, is a marvelous, logical, sensible, understandable, thrilling message.

There are four parts of the New Testament. First of all, the life of Christ in four dimensions—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Then, the life of Christ goes into how to become a Christian in the one book of Acts—the book of conversions in the New Testament; how men became Christ "ians"—Christians, the ones who belong to Jesus, those who were a part of him and, as a result, would follow Him. And then we have, in the third stanza of the the New Testament, how to live the Christian life.

We see the life of Christ, how to become a Christian, and how to live as a Christian. Romans through Jude, twenty-one epistles, tell us of Christian living. Finally, the book of Revelation tells of the hope of the Christian.

How could you find a more systematic book than one that tells of the life of Christ, how to become a Christian, how to live as a Christian, and how to die as a Christian? In fact, Revelation 14:13 says, "...Blessed are the dead [happy are those] who die in the Lord, ...that they may rest from their labors and their works follow them." The message of the New Testament essentially is Christ.

Matthew was written to the Hebrews and stressed the kingdom of Christ. The thought it would be an earthly reign, but His is a spiritual rule in the hearts and lives of men and women. In Matthew 28:18, our Lord said just before he went back to

heaven, "... All authority has been given unto me in heaven and in earth."

The book of Mark stresses Christ—the majesty of Christ, the powerful Christ— written to the Romans, the military mind of the day. Forty-two times in sixteen chapters, the word "straightway" is found. The immediacy, the urgency of the life of Christ is written to those who wanted things "to the point." Mark sums up the book concerning Jesus, "...He hath done all things well" (Mark 7:37).

The book of Luke is probably the lesser known of the four accounts of His life. There are not four gospels; there are four accounts of the one gospel. They tell the good news, the glad tidings of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God. We see God's power to save (Romans 1:16). In the book of Luke, we read that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). The Greeks were interested in the ideal man, but Jesus adds a fourth dimension to their three dimensional concept. He also was ideal spiritually.

The book of John is written to all mankind in twenty-one scintillating chapters. It summaries the first four books and has, as its key thought, John 14:6. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." At the end of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, is this statement of John 20:30–31, "...but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." So, we have four vantage points, four different views, four different emphases concerning Christ. He is the King. He does all things well. He is perfect physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually and He is the only way to the Father. Spiritual life is in Him and, apart from Him, we wander hopelessly, uselessly, and aimlessly in a wicked world. If, however, you put Christ into the heart of human history, then human history makes sense. A Christ-centered life is a heaven bound life because it is a Bible based life. When we speak of New Testament Christianity, we speak mainly of Christ, the author of it.

Now we come to the book of Acts; twenty-eight chapters with two major points. We read in Acts 4:12, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven

given among men by which we must be saved." He is the only way. And they "...went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

The book of Acts can be divided using Acts 1:8. Jesus said, "...you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." and that is what the book of Acts is all about. They started in Jerusalem with the gospel: "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." "...Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And there was great joy in that city" (Acts 8:5, 8). And so we read of the spread of the gospel of Christ in the Roman Empire. The truth was emblazoned across the Caesar-held territory and the gospel of the Son of God overwhelmed the wickedness of men.

The reason the Roman Empire began to crumble into dust at the end of the first century was because of the dynamics of Christianity. The Roman Empire were dealt a staggering blow by the tremendous, awesome strength of the gospel of the Son of God.

In the book of Acts, we read of the establishment of the church and how men became Christians. The church of the New Testament was begun on the day of Pentecost about fifty days after the death of our Lord and, on this occasion, that which the prophets foretold, the kingdom of God, was set up. "I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28). The law of the Lord went forth from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-3). Christianity had its awesome, spectacular beginning. Residents of nations from all parts of the Roman empire gathered in Jerusalem and they returned to their homes to spread the gospel. Strangers from Rome and some from the island of Crete were there. Read Acts 2:10 and following. What a tremendous, propitious occasion for Christianity to have its start.

The church of which we are members must go back to Acts 2, to Jerusalem, to the first century. If it were started later than that, at any other place than there, by anyone other than the apostles, it is not the New Testament church. If your church has some earthly headquarters with a creed book written by man or is a church established by some great reformer or renaissance leader, it is not the church that you read about in the Bible. Acts 20:28 says, "...to shepherd the church of God

which He purchased with His own blood." Ephesians 5:25–27 says, "...also as Christ

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loved the church and gave himself for her ... that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing."

If you would like to read the greatest single account of conversion of an individual in all the history of the world, read Acts 8:26-39. Here, Philip, an evangelist, preaches to the secretary of the treasury of the country of Ethiopia. Philip began at Isaiah 53 and preached Jesus unto him. "Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water ... he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:36-39). Philip, the preacher, went to Caesarea to preach Christ to others so they could rejoice when they were baptized unto Christ unto the remission of past sins.

And so we have the life of Christ—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the establishment of the church and how to become a Christian—the book of Acts, especially Acts chapter 2 and following. We also have the historical background for many of the epistles [letters] which follow.

Before you read Galatians, read Acts 13:14, where the gospel came to the regions of Galatia on the first evangelistic tour. The book of Philippians has its background in Acts 16; Thessalonians in Acts 17; Corinthians in Acts 18; the book of Ephesians in I Timothy and Revelation chapter 2. In Acts 19, the gospel came to the city of Ephesus, where there was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a beautiful marble temple erected to the goddess Diana. And so we have the background in the book of Acts for most of the New Testament books which follow Acts.

Now we come to the largest section of the outline of the New Testament. Twenty-one epistles, Romans through Jude, tell us how to live the Christian life. Notice how every single one of these books is

Christ centered. Romans 1:16 speaks of the good news and the glad tidings of the gospel of Christ. That's God's dynamite; God's power to save.

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The dynamics of Christianity is not human philosophy. it's not social prestige or business acumen. The thrust of Christianity is "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (Romans 2:16; I Timothy 1:11). "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (I Thessalonians 2:4). It is that gospel that we are commissioned and commanded and urged to preach (I Corinthians 9:16). We preach other types of preaching far too much. We should preach the one kind of preaching God ordained, commands and insists upon—gospel preaching, Bible preaching, preaching that exalts Christ, the heart of the gospel.

Then we come to the thrust of the book of I Corinthians: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). If we build upon any other foundation, it isn't solid. It will not endure the effects and storms of life. We must build our hopes on Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the resplendent Redeemer, the magnificent Maker, and bow in submission to his blessed will and say, "Lord, what do You want me to do" (Acts 9:6)? When Saul asked that question, he was told what he must do: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). So Paul, who wrote half of the New Testament, inspired of the Holy Spirit, wrote that the gospel of Christ is God's power to save. There is no other foundation but Him.

In II Corinthians 2:14, we read this continuing saga. We are always led in triumph in Christ; not in Moses, David, Abraham, Joshua, or Solomon or Simon Peter or John the Immerser. We are always led in triumph in Christ, and thus He will help us to wear the victor's wreath, if we obey Him. "And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

On the last page of the Bible, one more time we are reminded, "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14). Jesus said, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say" (Luke 6:46)? Jesus said, "You

are my friends if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:14). That's the way to always be led in triumph in Christ, regardless of what the world may say or do. "...we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us ..." (Romans 8:35-39).

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Then we come to the book of Galatians. Many people believe Galatians 2:20 is the most beautiful and eloquent verse Paul ever wrote. When you understand that he wrote half of the New Testament, that's quite a startling statement. Galatians 2:20 sums up the gist of his love for the Lord: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

In Ephesians 3:21, we read of Christ and the church. That's the thesis and emphasis of this rich, six chapter book. "to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Was it not Jesus who said in the coast of Caesarea Philippi over 1900 years ago, "on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18)? Peter had just confessed Him as the Son of God which indeed He was, and upon that bedrock foundation of truth, He built His church and we should honor and pay homage to that and not some denominational structure, something started by a man or a woman many, many years after He shed His blood to purchase His church (Acts 20:28).

Then we come to Philippians which many believe is the richest, most enthralling of all Bible books. "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Let Christ be the purpose of your life (Philippians 1:21), the pattern of your life (Philippians 2:5), the prize of your life (Philippians 3:14), and that which empowers your life (Philippians 4:13).

We now come to Colossians. For some reason, it is the lesser known of the epistles. It consists of four sterling chapters that exalt Jesus Christ. In Colossians 1:27, we read, "...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." In Colossians 2:10, we see, "You are complete in Him." Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." If

you are coming to realize that the New Testament is Christ centered, you are exactly right. The message of the New Testament is Christ, and if you get very far away from Him, you are a long way from home, in the spiritual arena.

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Now we come to I and II Thessalonians, two of the earliest epistles, chronologically, that Paul ever wrote. Some think Galatians, the book of Mark, and I Thessalonians were definitely the earliest of all the New Testament books, written in the early or middle fifties of the first century. There are three major teachings in I and II Thessalonians:

1. The second coming of Christ. He will come as a thief in the night and no one knows when (I Thessalonians 5:2).
2. Before He comes, there will be a gigantic departure from the truth; an apostasy. In II Thessalonians 2:7, Paul said, "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work." Apostasy had already begun in Paul's day. It's not something yet to begin. It began 1900 years ago. Those who teach that the last days are soon to come upon us are 1900 years too late. Paul said in his day that lawlessness had already begun.
3. The third major point of I and II Thessalonians is an exhortation to greater faithfulness and no slothfulness or laziness which God will not tolerate. "...If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat," is the message of II Thessalonians 3:10. That takes care of the welfare state in a hurry and a lot of lazy people that will not work. The Bible says that we are to work and we are to be ardent and not lazy.

Nothing hurts the case of Christ more than a member of the church who is lazy and indolent and will not do what he ought to do. In fact, we need to so labor that we'll be able to help others. That is a part of Christianity; to reach out to those in benevolence that need our help.

I Timothy 4:16 says, "Take heed to yourself and the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." I Timothy 3:15 tells us the church of our Lord is the bulwark of truth. All the way through this book Christ is exalted. In I Timothy 1:15, Paul wrote, "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." You cannot read the New Testament

honestly, personally, openly, and get any other impressions but that Christ is in the heart and core of all of it. And we all stand

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on level ground at the foot of the cross and He motivates each of us to do His will.

In II Timothy 2:19, we read of the responsibility of Christians. Its not enough to be baptized into Christ, we must get up from that and go forward in serving Christ. "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Christians have a responsibility to be unworldly. Jesus said, "...you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world..." (John 15:19).

But it is in the book of Titus that we come for what many Bible scholars say is the one verse that summarizes everything that Paul ever wrote. That would be quite a verse! Titus 2:12 is such a passage. "...we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age." Why? Because Christ Jesus came to give us " hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2). It is by His mercy and grace that we are cleansed from sin, though, in the past, we were once disobedient, unruly, ungodly, lascivious, licentious (Titus 3:3-7). Now, because of Him and the Christ centered, Christ-patterned life, we rise above the petty nature of the worldly way and live in an ardent, devoted, sincere, godly way, for without holiness, no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12).

Now we come to one of the five one-chapter books in the Bible. One, Obadiah, is in the Old Testament. and four—Philemon, II John, III John, and Jude are in the New Testament.

Continuing the saga, the thought, and the emphasis of Christ, the book of Philemon tells of a run-away slave named Onesimus. Philemon was a brother in Christ who was a master of slaves. There were 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire at the time of this book. Here is a case in which Christians are told that whether they are masters or slaves, to give the best they have so that Christianity will not be hindered. Philemon, who Paul had previously converted to Christ, was an owner of slaves and he is enjoined to receive Onesimus, a run-away slave, back. Paul sends Onesimus back to him as a Christian, a loved brother in the Lord. He sends him back with this epistle saying entreat him in such a way to strengthen him because he is a babe in

Christ. Do not weaken him but make him stronger because of your faithfulness in the Lord. Paul also said, "But if he has wronged you

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or owes you anything, put that on my account...not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides" (Philemon 18–19). Paul said, "But, meanwhile also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you" (Philemon 22). "Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Philemon 8–9). "Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say" (Philemon 21). Christ is the heart and core of Paul's and Onesimus' and Philemon's life. As a result, even the difficult arrangement of slavery in the Roman Empire could be meshed together with Christianity when each serves as they should.

Then we come to the book of Hebrews—the most Christ centered of all the New Testament epistles. Here is the gem of all revelation, the book of Hebrews which ties the Old and New Testament together, centered on Christ. God now speaks to us through His Son. The opening stanza, Hebrews 1:1–2, says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,...through whom He also made the worlds." He is the effulgent or brightness or exact impress of His person. Then, in Hebrews 2:9, we read, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." We are to keep our gaze permanently fixed on Christ (Hebrews 12:2). He is the Son over His own house. He is the perfect high priest. For such a high priest is becoming unto us, who is holy, blameless, undefiled, separate from sinners, made higher than the heavens. He ever lives to make intercession for us. "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Hebrews 13:20). "by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant (Hebrews 7:22).

The book of James is Christ centered in its practicality. Every single day we are to live for Jesus. "Therefore to him that knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

I Peter 4:16 gives us a summary of everything we have said and tells us why we are on earth and whom it is we are to glorify. "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." Never forget I Peter 4:16. "Yes, and all

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who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12). "This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him" (II Timothy 2:11-12).

The three chapters of II Peter end by saying, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen" (II Peter 3:18). We are partakers with Christ of the divine nature; we are heirs of like precious faith. All things that pertain to life and godliness have been revealed to us through Christ—all of that in the first chapter of II Peter—and so we are to advance spiritually in Jesus' name, the Christ centered nature of the new covenant.

Then we come to the book of I John. "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world" (I John 4:14). He is the lawyer that heaven appoints to plead our case. I John 2:2 reads, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." In I John 1:7, we have the marvelous reminder, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

In II John, verses 9-11, another one chapter book, we are told, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." So the doctrine of Christ, that which Jesus taught and which He demands, we must abide in. Just as the demons have doctrines, I Timothy 4:1-2, Christ has one

doctrine and we need to abide in that; the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

III John says that we are not to follow evil men like Diotrephes, who loved the preeminence. You know what was wrong with Diotrephes? In Christianity, Christ has all the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). Anyone who claims to be a Christian and wants preeminence has forgotten the essence of Christianity; Christ, who is exalted with all authority in heaven and in earth. Diotrephes tried to push out Christ and His message, but the apostle John said for us to follow that which is righteous and not that which is evil. Follow Christ.

Next, we come to the book of Jude. Jude is such a powerful book and it tells of the common salvation. All men stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. "...contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude

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3). "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 24–25).

Finally we come to the book of Revelation. Jesus said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). "...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, ...that they may rest from their labors; and their works follow them" (Revelation 14:13). "...He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called chosen, and faithful" (Revelation 17:14). We can overcome the devil through the blood of Christ, his word, and by being willing to die for his cause (Revelation 12:11). Finally, He invites us to come into the glory of heaven, the garden of God, the tree of life, and there live forevermore in His presence.

The story of the New Testament is the life of Christ, how to become a Christian, how to live as a Christian, and how to die in Christ. I can think of no greater finale than the last verse of II Corinthians, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen" (II Corinthians 13:14). We are forever indebted to the clarity, the usefulness, and the

thrilling nature of the New Testament which is totally Christ centered.
The message of the Bible is Jesus Christ.



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