

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

# EPISODE 22: MAKE IT MAKE SENSE

## LOVE LETTERS: EPISTLES AS A GENRE

### CONTEXT

In this episode, we will discuss how the reader should approach any biblical text. As we continue to look at interpretation, we'll look at another genre—epistles or letters—and give you tips on how to properly interpret these kinds of biblical texts.

**Interpretation asks the question: What does it mean? (William Hendricks)**

### IMPORTANCE OF GENRES IN INTERPRETATION

- i. Literary Form or Genre
  - a) The Bible involves writings from various genres. Genres have rules for their interpretation. Just as it is important to understand genre for music or movies, it's important to understand biblical genre.
  - b) Biblical genres (con't)
    - 1) Covered so far—narratives, law, wisdom, poetry, prophecy, gospels, parables, apocalyptic literature
    - 2) Covering this week: Epistles/letters

### EPISTLES/LETTERS

- i. General Observations
  - a) Epistle is a common form of letter written in NT context. Includes introduction, text, and conclusion. But biblical writers include theological language in sections to distinguish their letters. (Example: "Greetings!" in customary letters becomes "Grace and peace...")
  - b) An epistle or letter presupposes two parties: author and intended audience. Need to know both to understand the letter.
  - c) 21 of 27 books of the NT are in the form of a letter. Four categories
    - 1) Paul (to churches): Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians
    - 2) Paul (to people): 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
    - 3) Anonymous: Hebrews—reads like a sermon
    - 4) Catholic Epistles (not the Catholic church, just "universal") (meant for general circulation): James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude

ii. Things to Keep in Mind

- a) *Epistles/Letters are the most "occasional" of all the NT genres.* They were written to a specific people, for a specific purpose, to address specific problems. Author, audience, and atmosphere are very important in looking at epistles.
- b) *Occasions may lead to universal principles or time-bound, limited application.* Head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (limited)
- c) *Keep in mind there may have been letters sent that prompted the communication* (see Paul and 1 Cor. 5:9-13).
- d) *Epistles and letters have reasoned arguments with logical flow.* Paul's letters move from doctrine to instruction. From indicatives to imperatives.

## EXAMPLES

i. Communion and Corinth

- a) **1 Corinthians 11:27-29**-What do we know about the Corinthian church?
  - 1) In context-Church at Corinth had a drinking problem (1 Corinthians 11:21); General principle-disregard for needs of others in congregation subverts body of Christ and leads to drinking unworthily.

ii. Women and the Church

- a) **1 Corinthians 11:2-16**-What did head coverings mean in that culture? Is it applicable today?
  - 1) In context- Head covering used in Roman religious practice. Socially elite believers may have continued to wear such head coverings when gathering for worship. Made others feel inferior. Women- In this culture, hair was the prime object of male lust. Uncovering and loosing a woman's hair publicly revealed her beauty.
- b) **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**-Should women keep silent in church?
  - 1) In context-Main point: reestablish order in worship, not to demean the honor of women or devalue their worship of God.
- c) **Philemon**-25 verses total. Shortest of Paul's letters.
  - 1) Audience-Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus (members of church that met in his home). They lived in Colossae.
  - 2) Occasion-Paul is in prison in Rome. One of the prison epistles. Others are multiple chapters. Issue important enough to write a short letter to make a plea. Philemon's slave Onesimus ran away. Paul is sending him back.
  - 3) Paul led him to Christ and tells him to go back to his master! (Discuss: Slave theology in America and eisegesis)
    - (1) Distinctions
      - (a) not chattel slavery (could own homes, raise families, etc...)
      - (b) he's to be considered a brother above all else (vs. 16)
      - (c) Read in light of Pauline corpus and biblical corpus: 1 Corinthians 7:21-win your freedom if you can, the loss of distinctions in Galatians 3:28; freedom motif in Scripture (Jubilee)
      - (d) Sent him back to set him free (vv. 16-17)