

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE



Prison Epistles

CHURCH OF  THE NAZARENE

CLT Bible Study

PRISON EPISTLES

Dr. Daryll Stanton, editor
Nataliia Skyba, contributing editor
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Continuing Lay Training
17001 Prairie Star Parkway
Lenexa, Kansas 66220 USA

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

Welcome to the Continuing Lay Ministries series of Bible studies. You are engaged in a study venture that will be both helpful and enjoyable. Here are a few suggestions that will make this Bible study the most beneficial to you.

1. Since this is a Bible study, have your Bible near you at all times. This study outline is only designed to help you read the Bible.
2. The Bible version used for this study is the New International Version (NIV). The editor primarily used the language of the NIV to prepare the lessons. You may use other versions of the Bible if you choose. While the language may be different, the meaning will be the same.
3. Before you begin each section, read the entire Scripture passage. This is very important. The study outline will help you understand the particular Bible verses, but it does not tell what they say.
4. **IMPORTANT:** Note that some of the scriptures from the particular book being studied may not have the book's name. For example, if the Bible reference is (1:6-8) in the Philippians sections, you will find these verses (6-8) in the first chapter of Philippians. Other books of the Bible will include the name in the reference, for example Isaiah 53:1 and John 17:1.
5. Go through the study outline carefully. Take time to look up all the Scripture verses in the outline.
6. You may want to mark your study Bible as you go. Marking your Bible will help the words become more and more your own.
7. Finally, read the Bible passage again to better understand its meaning.
8. The editor has also included how to pronounce some of the more difficult proper names and words. The first time the word is introduced, the pronunciation will follow the word. At the end of each chapter, you will find a list of the words in the order in which they were introduced. Additionally, at the end of the document, all of the words and pronunciations will be listed alphabetically. For pronunciation of additional terms and their definitions please refer to *A Dictionary of the Bible & Christian Doctrine in Everyday English* (Eby, et al, 2004).

If a family or a few friends decide to take this study together, here are two suggestions.

1. Have one person read the Bible passage and another person read the Continuing Lay Ministries outline.
2. Then discuss the Scripture and outline. Ask questions of each other to help clarify the meaning of the Scripture.

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CHAPTER 1

Background to the Prison Epistles

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I want you to meet St. Paul. But, to do so you will have to shake hands through prison bars. Too bad that such a nice man is in jail! The old apostle, you see, was really better acquainted with the prisons than the pulpits of his day. But, you see, it is not being in prison that makes a man a criminal. It is being in crime. Being in prison he refused to stagnate. Rather, he moved into his "office" and went to work writing some of the most precious Epistles [uh-PI-slz] ever penned by man free or fettered.

Four of Paul's letters – Ephesians [uh-FEE-zhnz], Philippians [fi-LIP-ee-uhnz], Colossians [kuh-LAA-shnz], and Philemon [fuh-LEE-muhn] - are usually considered together as the Prison Epistles. However, due to the uniqueness of Ephesians, it is considered separately in this series of Bible studies. All of these letters contain references to Paul's imprisonment or to his bonds: "I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:1); "my bonds in Christ" (Philippians 1:13); "Remember my bonds" (Colossians 4:18); "Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Philemon 9).

These references are to Paul's first imprisonment in Rome described in Acts 28:16-31. For two years Paul remained in Rome awaiting a disposition of the case brought against him by the Jews. During this period, he was permitted to live in his own rented quarters and to receive his friends and no doubt to preach. At all times, however, he was chained to a Roman soldier. The members of the Praetorium Guard were assigned to him by shift, and to all of them Paul faithfully bore witness (Philemon 1:13). In fact, the apostle won converts for Christ right in Caesar's household (Philemon 4:22).

Although the exact date of this imprisonment is difficult to set, it was probably A.D. 60-61. With enforced leisure to think and to write Paul penned some of his most precious letters at this time. His mind was drawn to consider the meaning of Christ, so these Epistles are generally classified as Christological [krist-UH-loj-i-kuhl].

Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians are closely related. They cluster around a certain incident and were probably delivered together. The conversion of Onesimus [oh-NESS-ih-muss] (a runaway slave) was the cause for the letter to Philemon. This was probably the initial occasion for all this prison correspondence. Tychicus was to return to Colosse [kuh-LOS-eye] with Onesimus, bearing Paul's letter to Philemon. At just about this time Epaphras [ep-uh-FRAS], a minister of the



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Colossian [kuh-LAA-shn] church, arrived in Rome with a report from Colosse. Paul decided to write that church and send the letter by Tychicus [TI-kuh-kuhs] and Onesimus (Colossians 4:7-9). He then wrote Ephesians on the same general theme of Colossians, making several copies of it for the other churches of Asia Minor, but sending it also by these messengers (6:21-22).

Philippians, the fourth Prison Epistle, was written later under different circumstances.

Ephesians [uh-FEE-zhnz]
Philippians [fi-LIP-ee-uhnz]
Colossians [kuh-LAA-shnz]
Philemon [fuh-LEE-muhn]
Christological [krist-UH-loj-i-kuhl]
Onesimus [oh-NESS-ih-muss]
Colosse [kuh-LOS-eye]
Colossian [kuh-LAA-shn]
Tychicus [TI-kuh-kuhs]

CHAPTER 2

Paul's Letter to the Philippians



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SECTION 2.1 BACKGROUND TO PHILIPPIANS

A. THE CITY OF PHILIPPI

The namesake of Philip 2 of Macedon [MA-suh-daan], father of Alexander [AL-ex-an-der] the Great, Philippi [FIL-uh-pie] occupied a strategic position in Macedonia [MAS-uh-DOH-nee-uh] only nine miles from the Aegean [uh-JEE-uhn] Sea. It lay on the famous Egnatian [ay-eeg-NAY-suhn] Way and carried the envied rank of a Roman colony.

Philippi was the site, in 42 B.C., of the famous battle in which the forces of Octavian [aak-TAY-vee-uhn] and Mark Anthony defeated those of Brutus [BROO-tuhs] and Cassius [KA-see-uhs], thus bringing to an end the Roman republic.

It was in 31 B.C. that Octavian, now Emperor Augustus, conferred upon Philippi the title of "colony," giving the people of the city all the pride and privileges of Roman citizenship including exemption from taxation. A copy of the mother city, the colony was in all respects "a miniature Rome," even in form and appearance. It was for these reasons undoubtedly that Luke referred to Philippi as "a chief city in that part of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12).

B. THE CHURCH IN PHILIPPI

It was in response to a vision in which "a man from Macedonia" urged him, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us," that Paul entered Europe with the gospel (Acts 16:9-12). There were not enough Jews in Philippi to justify a synagogue, so the apostle "went out of the city by a riverside" to a group of women who gathered there on the Sabbaths for worship (Acts 16:13). The first convert was the wealthy Lydia, who opened her house to the missionary party (Acts 16:14-15). The second outstanding convert was the jailer of the city (Acts 16:25-34). Before he left the city there was a sturdy church of gentile Christians there which, for the remainder of Paul's life, maintained an attentive attitude toward its founder (1:3-5; 4:10, 15-16).

C. PLACE AND DATE OF WRITING

Philippians is one of the four Prison Epistles. Paul's references to the "palace" (Praetorian Guard) [pree-TAW-ree-uhn gaard] and "Caesar's household" (1:13;

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4:22) for most scholars point to Rome as the place of writing (see Acts 28:30-31). *Philippians* was probably written before the other three letters of imprisonment, *Colossians*, *Ephesians*, and *Philemon*, which form a literary unit. The date of writing is not important for an understanding of the letter. David Smith suggests November, A.D. 60.

D. OCCASION, PURPOSE, AND NATURE OF LETTER

1. The Philippians had made up a gift of money and sent it to Paul by Epaphroditus [eh-PA-froh-dai-tuhs], one of their members (4:18). This timely gift called for a letter of thanks. The specific occasion for writing was the serious illness and homesickness of Epaphroditus (2:25-30).
2. In addition to expressing his heartfelt gratitude to the church for its thoughtfulness, Paul wrote to ensure Epaphroditus a good reception upon his return to Philippi. Moreover, he had learned from their emissary that there was friction in the congregation, stemming perhaps from a difference between two of the leading ladies in the church (4:2). The letter contains a powerful appeal to unity and modesty (1:27-2:4).
3. *Philippians* has been called a “spontaneous utterance of Christian love and gratitude.” As such it has even less plan and arrangement than Paul’s letters generally. Any outline is arbitrary. Instead of the usual order - information, doctrine, practical application - there is an intermingling of all three throughout. As he exhorts the church to unity, Paul breaks forth in a sublime passage on the person and work of Christ (2:5-11). When he is about to conclude the letter, he is interrupted by some new turn of events in Rome and launches into a sustained attack upon Judaism [JOO-dee-i-zm] and antinomianism [AN-ti-noh-mee-n-is-m] (3:1-21). This discussion offers many insights into the nature of Christian righteousness and Christian perfection.

This little letter is “like a window into the apostle’s own bosom.” Although he is imprisoned as he writes, this is no gloomy writing. The call to rejoice is sounded so often that more than one student has subtitled *Philippians* “The Epistle of Joy.” Indeed, one has suggested that here we are taught “salvation by joy.” The buoyant confidence which breathes throughout has made this letter a favorite of many an embattled follower of Christ and a source of unequalled inspiration to many a faithful believer imprisoned by the bitter circumstances of life.

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SECTION 2.2 PERSONAL INTRODUCTION (1:1 - 26)

A. SALUTATION (1:1-2)

1. Authorship (1:1)

“... and Timothy.” See the magnanimity of Paul; and his humility: “[bond] servants of Jesus Christ.” They considered themselves “servants of all” (see Mark 10:42-45). See 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Exodus 21:1-6.

2. Destination of letter (1:1)

First, “the saints in Christ Jesus.” All New Testament believers are “saints.” “In Christ” they had received the Holy Spirit. As such, they were *claimed* as Christ’s property (1 Corinthians 3:23), *cleansed* from the guilt and practice of sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), and *called* to completeness in Christ (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Secondly, “with the overseers and deacons.” The “overseers” of the flock of God (Acts 20:28) were also called “elders” or “presbyters” (Acts 20:17). “Deacons” were literally “ministers” or “servants,” who probably looked after the temporal needs of the congregation (Acts 6:1-6).

3. The Salutation (1:2)

“Grace” and “peace” mingle the Greek and Hebrew salutations, but grace always precedes peace (Romans 5:1). Note, our “Lord Jesus Christ” stands above us alongside “God our Father,” not the other way around. This revelation came to Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-6), and was the true source of his doctrine of Christ’s deity.

B. THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER FOR THE PHILIPPIANS (1:3 - 11)

1. Memory (1:3)

Paul was not thinking of isolated memories of Philippi but of the total picture that was before his mind: “upon every remembrance of you.”

2. Gratitude (1:3)

From memory springs gratitude, bubbling up like a fountain. Paul could never forget all the kindnesses of this wonderful church. The memory-filled his heart with thanksgiving.

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3. Supplication (1:4)

There is a studied repetition of the word “all” in this letter. “My heart is open to you all; my prayers, my thanksgivings, my hopes, my obligations extend to *all*.” This is a part of his strategy to unite the Philippians. His sympathy was not with any clique in the church; he loved them all. This is a secret of pastoral success.

4. Co-operation (1:5)

Their sympathy with Paul in all his suffering and labor and their constant support of his ministry in prayer and gifts was what he meant by their “fellowship in the gospel.” Without such support, the gospel cannot reach the world.

5. Confidence (1:6)

While a believer may fail and be lost (Colossians 1:21-23; John 15: 6), the New Testament emphasis is *upon* the sufficiency of grace (Romans 8:31-39). God proposes to perfect and consummate the work of grace He has initiated in us by his Spirit: He is both Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 2:12-13).

6. Longing (1:7-8)

Paraphrase: “Did I speak of having you in my own heart? I should have rather said that in the heart of Jesus Christ I long for you.”

In the words of J.B. Lightfoot: “The believer has no yearnings apart from his Lord; his pulse beats with the pulse of Christ; his heart throbs with the heart of Christ.”

7. Prayer (1:9-11)

- a. For abounding love (1:9). Paul did not want their love to be doled out sparingly. There is little danger of excess in love.
- b. For discernment (1:9-10). Their love must overflow in “all manner of insight” (Moffatt). It is a flood of love Paul prays for, and yet a flood within the bounds of good sense and discretion. “That you may have a sense of what is vital” (1:10, Moffatt). A growing Christian learns to “test the things that differ.” Tithing, says Jesus, is obligatory; but faith, justice, and mercy are “weightier matters” (Matthew 23:23). A spiritual Christian has a sense of proportion; he majors on majors and minors on minors. Thus, he comes to have the poise and balance of Christ. A discerning Christian knows the difference between absolutes and relatives. He not only knows how to distinguish between the good and the bad; he can

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discriminate between “the things that transcend.”

- c. For purity and inoffensiveness (1:10). “Sincere” means “pure, unsullied, unmixed” (like pure gold, free from alloy). “Without offence” means to live so as not cause another to stumble (1 Corinthians 10:32). This is the perfection Christ would give us as preparation for his advent (Colossians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).
- d. For a harvest of righteousness (1:11). He means righteousness in Christ, as contrasted with righteousness by law (3:9).

In the words of J.B. Lightfoot: “Only so far as the life of the believer is absorbed in the life of Christ, does the righteousness of Christ become his own. Thus, righteousness by faith is intimately bound up with the life in Christ: it must in its very nature be fruitful; it is indeed the condition of bearing fruit (John 15:4).”

Such righteousness is not to the praise of men but “unto the glory and praise of God.” This is the only true aim of all human endeavor.

C. PAUL'S PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND FEELINGS, AND THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL IN ROME (1:12 - 26)

1. Progress of the Gospel (1:12)

God knows how to bring good out of ill (see Genesis 45:5-8; 50:20). As Sovereign He makes the wrath of people to praise him (Psalm 76:10), and all things work together for the good of those who love him (Romans 8:28). This was what Paul wanted the Philippians to see.

2. Sermons in Bonds (1:13)

Paul's bonds attracted attention to Christ and gave him an opportunity to preach Christ to all who were interested. He preached to each soldier who was chained to him (see also Ephesians 6:10-20) and thus made converts among the Praetorian Guard. Bishop Bergrava, during World War 2, had the same powerful witness for Christ. Authorities kept changing his guards to prevent him from converting all the Nazi soldiers to Christ!

3. Spurring Others to Action (1:14)

Paraphrase: “My bonds have inspired most of the brethren with boldness, *so that trusting in the Lord* they are more zealous than ever, and preach the word of God courageously.” (The words “in the Lord” are emphatic by their

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position.) Courage is contagious.

4. Preaching Christ from Mixed Motives (1:15-16)

The Judaizers [JEW-duh-ie-zerz], who insisted on circumcision as the seal of saving faith (Acts 15:1), took advantage of Paul's predicament to step up their activity, thinking thereby to irritate and wound him. Their missionary zeal took the form of a political canvass, to build up their party.

5. Preaching Christ from Love for Paul (1:15, 17)

At this, some sluggish souls woke up and began to take a new interest in the work of Christ. Seeing Paul under attack, they rallied around him and rose to the colors.

6. Paul's Point of View (1:18)

Paul could rejoice in all this. *In the Church*, where the choice was between the liberty of the gospel and the bondage of the law, he unsparingly denounced the Judaizers (Galatians 1:6-9). But *in the world*, where the alternative is between no presentation of Christ and an imperfect presentation, he could rejoice that, in any event, Christ was being made known to the outsiders.

7. Paul's Earnest Hope (1:19-20)

Paul knew that everything that was happening would contribute to his "salvation" in the highest sense. Trials develop Christlikeness and become the pathway to heaven. This is because, for the saint, there is a "supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." So, whether it means life or death, Christ is "magnified" in us. This is the subjective side of Romans 8:28 (see 1:12 again).

8. Paul's Personal Philosophy (1:21)

"Others may make a choice between life and death," says Paul; "I gladly accept either alternative. If I live, my life is one with Christ; if I die, my death is gain - for it is Christ either way.

9. Paul's Problem (1:22-26)

Paul is saying, "I am in a dilemma" (1:23, Moffatt), a dilemma created by the pull of *desire* on the one hand and *duty* on the other.

His desire was "to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." His duty was to stand by his post and continue his ministry to his converts. As he weighed these two, he chose the latter.

Desire as related to myself must be subordinated to duty as related to others.

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If we save others, we cannot save ourselves. Paul had a strong “confidence” that he would therefore be delivered to see his friends again (1:25-26).

SECTION 2.3 PRACTICAL EXHORTATIONS (1:27 - 3:1)

A. AN EXHORTATION TO UNITY AND HUMILITY (1:27 - 2:4)

1. Paul’s Plea (1:27-30)

“Under all circumstances conduct yourselves as good citizens of the heavenly Kingdom” (1:27, paraphrased). The King James Version always translates “conversation” (an old English word) as “conduct.” But, here the word suggests “the conduct of a citizen.” As Philippi was a “colony of Rome,” we believers are a “colony of heaven” (3:20, Moffatt). Let us live like it! Heavenly citizens are not politicians (1:27)! Rather than forwarding self-interest and factionalism, they “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” (see also 1 Corinthians 3:3-4, where Paul says religious politics is a carnal imitation of the men of the world!)

Heavenly citizens are not cowards (1:28). They don’t jump when the world says, “Boo!” (This is the suggestion of “terrified.”) The believer’s poise in the face of the world’s threats is proof to the world of its “perdition” and to the Christian of his “salvation.” Heavenly citizens accept suffering as a precious gift and privilege (1:29-30; see also Acts 5:41).

2. The Grounds of Paul’s Plea (2:1)

Paul gives four powerful incentives to unity, each couched in a conditional clause: “(1) If you have a true experience of Christ, (2) if love has any power by its tenderness to speak to you, (3) If your communion with the Spirit is not a mere profession but a reality, (4) if there is in you any ‘milk of human kindness,’ *then listen to me.*”

3. The Nature of the Plea (2:2)

The Philippians’ heeding of Paul’s plea will fill his cup of joy to overflowing (2:2). A congregation of Christians should have an accord of thought and feeling (2:2). The church is a choir; harmony is all-important!

4. The Virtue of Humility (2:3-4)

“Do nothing through factiousness or personal vanity” (2:3). As J. B. Lightfoot wrote: “The two impediments to a universal, diffusive, unconditional charity are the exaltation of party and the exaltation of self.”

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"Lowliness" was scorned by Greek ethical teachers as "meanness," but Christ makes humility the cardinal virtue. If self-exaltation is the epitome of sin, self-giving is the essence of virtue. "Others" is the Christian's motto (2:3). The Christian must not be motivated by self-interest (2:4). His concern must be the needs and interests of others, rather than self: Christ first, others second, self third.

B. CHRIST, THE GREAT PATTERN OF HUMILITY (2:5 - 11)

1. The Mind of Christ (2:5-8)

- a. The Imitation of Christ (2:5). We are to have the "disposition" (meaning of the word translated "mind") of Jesus - that is, the spirit of self-giving, self-denying love (Matthew 16:24). The disposition of love is the gift of the Spirit (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22). As regenerate Christians we are to give expression to this love, let it win its complete victory in our lives.
- b. The Self-emptying of Christ (2:6-8a). Lightfoot paraphrases verses 6-7: "Though He pre-existed in the form of God, yet He did not look upon equality with God as a prize which must not slip from his grasp, but He emptied himself, divested himself, taking upon him the form of a slave."

His Pre-existent Glory. Christ existed originally "in the form of God." "Form" does not mean shape but the essence of a thing. Before He became flesh the Son shared in the very nature of God that is, He partook of the divine glory (John 17:5; Hebrews 1:3). Moreover, He shared "equality with God" (see also John 1:1). The creeds later confessed, "Jesus Christ, Very God of Very God." This is what Paul means.

The Divestment of His Glory. Jesus did not consider his equality with God a thing to be selfishly prized, but "for us people and for our salvation" chose to come down to earth and subject himself to the limitations of our humanity in order to redeem us from sin and restore us to the favor of God (see 2 Corinthians 8:9). He "emptied himself" (KJV, "made himself of no reputation"). Of what did He empty himself?

His heavenly prerogatives. He divested himself of his glory with the Father (John 17:5) and took upon himself "the form of a slave" (Mark 10:45). He voluntarily relinquished the exercise of his heavenly powers (Matthew 26:53) and veiled his glory (2:8). Those who looked upon Jesus "found" one "in fashion as a man." Jesus was God incognito. A few who loved "beheld his glory" (John 1:14), but the careless multitudes never guessed his true identity (John 1:26; see also 1 Corinthians 2:8).

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2. The Exaltation (2:9-11)

Jesus is the supreme expression of his own saying, "He who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). This was not a reward but a *consequence* of his self-giving. Because God is self-giving Love (1 John 4:16), the principle of self-realization through self-sacrifice is written into the very nature of things (Matthew 16:25). Nothing truly lives that has not first died (John 12:23-25). Behold Jesus exalted to the Father's right hand (Acts 2:30-36; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1). He obtained as a gift what He had renounced as a prize.

What is the "name which is above every name"? It is the name *Lord*. The true Christian confession is "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). We are reminded of Charles Lamb's saying that, if Shakespeare appeared in our midst, we would all rise; but if Jesus came, we would all kneel. The whole universe, whether animate or inanimate, bends the knee in homage and raises its voice in praise, confessing that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

C. AN EXHORTATION TO PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY (2:12 - 18)

1. Working in and Working out (2:12-13)

The salvation we are commanded to "work out" is not justification, or *initial* salvation, for this is by grace through faith (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-10), but the salvation of *process following justification* (see 1:6). Our salvation will not be complete until we stand "perfected in Christ" (1 John 3:2; Romans 13:11; 1 Peter 1:5). Meanwhile we must "press toward the mark" (3:12-14, 20-21).

How must we work? First, "with a nervous and trembling anxiety to do right" (2:12). Secondly, with the sure confidence that "it is God who energizes us both to will and to perform his good pleasure" (2:13). As John Wesley affirmed: "Because God works, I *can* work. Because God works, I *must* work." Consider the truth that our salvation from first to last is a response to his grace: "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

2. Witnessing before the World (2:14-18)

a. Cheerfulness under Orders (2:14). We are soldiers under orders - it is unmilitary to fret at God's commands (see also 1 Corinthians 10:10). Inward murmurings against God easily turn to grumblings toward each other. We must neither "murmur" nor "dispute." We must carry out the orders of the Captain of our salvation cheerfully.

b. Perfection amidst Imperfection (2:15-16). Here is what God requires



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of us, that we are “Blameless” -that is, without fault before others (see Daniel 6: 4); “Harmless” - literally, “unmixed, unadulterated,” like pure milk or unalloyed metal (our thoughts being guileless, our devotion unmixed with selfishness and insincerity); “Sons of God without rebuke” - literally, “without blemish” (Ephesians 1:4; 5:25-27). And this is before “a twisted and perverted generation.” In the midst of moral darkness Christians are to shine as luminaries, “holding forth the word of life” as the Statue of Liberty holds, aloft the torch of freedom in a world of growing night.

- c. Paul’s Reward (2:16). A Christian workman’s reward is the final salvation of his converts (see also 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19).
- d. Paul’s Sacrifice (2:17). The apostle so loved his converts he was ready to pour out his lifeblood as a libation [lai-BAY-shn] over the sacrificial offering of their faith.
- e. Mutual Joy (2:17-18). Fellowship is a blessed reality, even when it demands the supreme sacrifice. Paul wanted this to be a mutual joy between himself and the Philippians.

SECTION 2.4 PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS (2:19 - 30)

A. PROPOSED VISIT OF TIMOTHY (2:19 - 24)

1. Paul’s Plans (2:19)

Paul’s plans were not self-originated; they proceeded from “the Lord Jesus” - the center of his choices. This is no mere pious phrase it represents his philosophy of life. Christ was both the center and the circumference of his life (Galatians 2:20). His object in sending Timothy was twofold: (1) his own comfort (see also 1 Thessalonians 3:7-8) and (2) the guidance of the Philippians.

2. Timothy’s Single-minded Love (2:20-23)

Timothy’s life was Christ-centered, like Paul’s. Therefore, others came before self. This is perfect love: single-mindedness (see also Matthew 6:22). Paul may have, for the moment, given way to a pessimistic feeling. “Except for Timothy,” he says, “the whole number put their interests before the interests of Christ.” That is quite an indictment. It points to the subtle but deadly danger of mixed motivation in Christian life and service. (See Matthew 6:1-16, where Jesus lays bare this threat). Does Christ really have priority in our

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service? "If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light." Matthew 6:22)

3. Paul's Trust about Himself (2:24)

"The Lord willing," Paul says, "I too shall come to you shortly" (see also 1 Corinthians 4:17-19). Man proposes; God disposes.

B. THE ILLNESS, RECOVERY, AND MISSION OF EPAPHRODITUS (2:25 - 30)

Paul faced the immediate necessity of sending Epaphroditus at once, for two reasons: the anxiety of Epaphroditus and the Philippians' anxiety about him (2:25-26). The simple truth is that Epaphroditus was intensely homesick. Paul's sympathy is proof of his greatness.

The touch of human sympathy is life itself. "The truth of the matter is," Paul says, "he nearly died, but God had mercy on both him and me. I am sending him back to you. Receive him with open hearts and genuine esteem. He has risked his life on my behalf for your sakes" (see 2:27-30).

SECTION 2.5 APOSTOLIC WARNINGS (3:1 - 4:1)

A. A FINAL INJUNCTION INTERRUPTED (3:1)

Paul now bids his readers farewell and says in substance, "Forgive me for getting back to an old topic; but it is not bothersome for me to speak, and it is safe for you to hear." *He is about to put in one more injunction to unity.* But he is interrupted. From what follows we gather he has been informed of some fresh attempt of the Judaizers to thwart and annoy him. A frightening thought comes to his mind: What if these Judaizers should invade Philippi? This leads him to expose the errors of a Judaistic [JOO-duh-is-tik] interpretation of the gospel; but while he is doing this, he decides also to warn against the opposite error of discarding the moral law along with the ceremonial observances (see also Romans 3:8).

B. WARNING AGAINST JUDAIZERS (3:2 - 11)

1. Their Evil Character (3:2)

Paul calls the Judaizers by the very name they applied to Gentiles: "dogs." His readers knew the figure. Herds of dogs prowled the cities, feeding on the



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refuse and filth of the streets, quarreling among themselves and attacking the passers-by. In effect he says: "They speak of themselves as God's children; they boast of eating at God's table; they reproach us as dogs. I reverse the image. *We* are the children, for we banquet at the gospel feast; *they* are the dogs, for they greedily snap up the garbage of carnal ordinances, the very scraps of God's table." He changes the figure: The Judaizers are *mutilators* (3:2). This is the meaning of "circumcision". Paul is not one to mince words.

2. Their Erroneous Doctrine (3:3)

These false teachers put their confidence in the carnal ordinance of circumcision. "We possess the true circumcision," Paul answers, "not of the flesh but of the heart; and we also offer the true worship, not of the letter but of the spirit" (Colossians 2:11; Romans 2:28-29; 7:6).

3. Paul's Religious Privileges (3:4-6)

For the moment Paul puts himself on the same standing ground as the Judaizers, who were boasting of their Jewish privileges. In order to get the correct point of view read 2 Corinthians 11:17-22. He is being forced to speak "foolishly" by the brags of the Judaizers.

a. Inherited Privileges (3:4-5).

- i. He had been born under the Abrahamic [ay-bruh-HA-muhk] covenant (Genesis 17:10-12; Leviticus 12:1, 3).
- ii. He could trace his ancestry back to Jacob (Genesis 32:28).
- iii. He was of the same tribe as King Saul (Acts 13:21), the loyal and respected tribe of Benjamin.
- iv. Although he was brought up in Tarsus, he was no mere Hellenistic [heh-luh-NI-stik] Jew. His parents had come lately from Palestine [PAL-uh-styn] and had retained Hebrew customs. He himself had been brought up under a great Hebrew teacher in Jerusalem [juh-REW-suh-lum] (Acts 22:3) and spoke Hebrew fluently (Acts 21:40; 22:2). He was "a Hebrew of Hebrew ancestry."

b. Personal Achievements (3:5-6).

In addition to the above inherited privileges, the apostle goes on to speak of matters which depended on his own personal choice. He mentions three grounds for boasting.

- i. He was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). Of the strictest sect of the Jews, he always revered the law (Romans 7:12, 14).

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- ii. He had demonstrated his zeal for the law by persecuting, imprisoning, and slaying Christians (see Acts 8:1).
- iii. In that righteousness which consisted in obedience to formal precepts he was blameless. The sense is, "I omitted no observance however trivial" ("blameless" here applies to sins of omission).

4. A New Set of Values (3:7-8)

Like a hoarder, Paul once stored up the above prerogatives, priding himself in his supposed spiritual wealth, listing them in the ledger of life as "gain." Now having met Christ, he erases the word "gain" and writes instead "loss"! In Christ, he has found an entirely new set of values.

5. Gaining Christ (3:8-11)

His surpassing aim is now to gain *more* of Christ (3:8). It is impossible to exhaust "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8), for in Christ are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3). He purposes to be "*found*" in Christ (3:9), both now and in the day of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Corinthians 13:5-6). This involves having faith - righteousness through Christ (see comments on 1:11). There are only two kinds of righteousness: man's righteousness (by privilege and achievement) and God's righteousness (by faith in Christ). Only the latter will stand God's judgment.

He yearns to *know Christ in a richer and fuller way* (3:10). The essence of knowing Christ is realizing the power of his resurrection, but this means we must first participate in his death. "Being made conformable unto his death," we may experience the inflow of his resurrection power (see Romans 6:3-11). This is the life of holiness, kept alive moment by moment by union with the living Christ. Thus, Paul hopes to *attain to the resurrection "from among" the dead at the coming of Christ* (3:11; see Luke 20:35; Acts 4:2; 1 Peter 1:3; Revelation 20:6). The resurrection "of" the dead is for the wicked also; Paul determines that he will have part in the "first" resurrection.

C. WARNING AGAINST ANTINOMIANS (3:12 - 4:1)

Having dealt with the Judaizers, Paul now turns to the antinomians [AN-ti-noh-mee-nz] (*anti* - against; *nomos* - law), who taught that the believer is free not only from the ceremonial law but also from the moral law. We may paraphrase Paul: "Not as though by my conversion I did at once attain or were now already perfected." The antinomians taught that the believer in Christ has "arrived," is "perfect," and is therefore under no obligation to keep even the Ten



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Commandments. This was a perversion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. (See also Romans 6:15.)

1. Paul's Example (3:12-14)

Paul disclaims any complete or final perfection - that perfection will come at the resurrection (3:11). "Sinless perfection" in this sense is yet future. Paul has not yet reached this goal of finalized perfection. Instead of congratulating himself that he has arrived, he pictures himself as a runner in pursuit of perfection. His goal is to fulfill the ideal which Christ had for him when He grasped him on the Damascus road (3:12). That ideal of course is complete Christlikeness. "My brethren!" Paul cries, "I have not yet apprehended this ideal." Christ had grasped him, but he had not finally grasped Christ. The Christian life is a movement requiring concentration, a forgetting of past achievements as well as past failures, a runner's eagerness in pressing toward the finish line (3:13-14; see also 1 Corinthians 9:24 and 2 Timothy 2:10; 4:8).

2. The Right Point of View (3:15-16)

"Get my point of view," Paul counsels, "if you really are perfect" (3:15). Here is a paradox: "Not perfected, but perfect." The apostle disclaims final perfection but classes himself among those who are "perfect." Who are the "perfect"? They are the "spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:6-15). They are spiritual adults, in contrast to "babes in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:12 - 6:3; 1 Corinthians 13:10-12; 14:20). They are the "fathers" of whom John writes (1 John 2:13). The "perfect" are the Spirit-filled, who have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). So, Paul is saying, "If you are really perfect, you will be on the stretch for complete Christlikeness. Then, if you are at fault anywhere else, God will disclose this to you." The perfect life is thus a life sound at the core but nonetheless a life of spiritual and moral progress.

3. Living Worthy of Imitation (3:17)

"Join with others in imitating me," Paul writes (see 1 Corinthians 11:1). A preacher must set a Christlike example, worthy of emulation. But not only the preacher. "Take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" means that others besides Paul were living exemplary lives. This is not self-conceit; it is practical holiness (1 John 2:6).

4. Spurious Christianity (3:18-19)

These so-called believers in Christ, Paul says parenthetically, who claim that they are "perfect" and flout the moral law are really enemies of Christ and his gospel; they are headed for destruction; they are idolaters, for their appetite is their God; they are completely mastered by their selfish and

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sensual desires. Unless our faith produces a harvest of righteousness we are deceiving ourselves in our claim to be in the way of Christ. True faith leads to holiness of heart and life.

5. "A Colony of Heaven" (3:20)

As believers, our citizenship is in heaven. Although we still live in this world physically, through faith in Christ we have begun to live the Kingdom life. For us, heaven has begun. Moffatt's translation of 3:20 is a stroke of genius. It helps us to see that Paul is really saying, "As you Philippians are a colony of Rome, with all the privileges of Roman citizenship, although you are far removed from the Imperial City, so you are also a colony of Heaven, with all the privileges of heavenly citizenship, although for the present you reside on earth."

6. Our Hope for Final Perfection (3:20-21)

As citizens of the kingdom of God we are awaiting the return of the King (3:20). When He returns, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as He is" (1 John 3:2). These bodies of our present humiliation will that instant be refashioned "like his glorious body." This is the final perfection for which Paul yearned in 3:12. (See Romans 8:17-23 for a more complete statement of this Christian hope).

7. Standing Fast (4:1)

"Bearing these things in mind, living as citizens of heaven, having this hope of a coming Savior, stand fast in the Lord."

SECTION 2.6 FINAL REMINDERS (4:2-19)

A. A FINAL APPEAL TO UNITY (4:2-3)

The apostle now exhorts two prominent women (by name!) to settle their differences (4:2). He calls upon his true "yokefellow" (does he mean Epaphroditus?) to assist those women who had belonged to the original company which had stood by him when he had founded the church at Philippi (see Acts 16:13), with Clement also and the others who had labored with Paul in those days, "whose names are in the book of life" (4:3). Paul is saying, "Take hold of the situation; help these people to solve their differences; be a peacemaker." Paul has returned to his central concern. No matter how "right" we may be, we are wrong if we are fostering dissension in the church.

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B. A FINAL EXHORTATION (4:4-9)

1. To Gladness (4:4)

We can “rejoice in the Lord always” because our gladness is grounded, not in circumstances, but in our relationship to Christ. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction of the gospel.

2. To Forbearance (4:5)

Since Christ’s coming is at hand, we may easily bear with others. “Let your gentleness be evident to all,” says Paul, “the Lord is near.”

3. To Freedom from Care (4:6-7)

Cast your care upon God; constantly lift your heart to him in thankful and expectant prayer (4:6). If this is your attitude, the peace of God will guard your soul and make you a peacemaker in the church (4:7).

4. To High Thinking (4:8)

“Finally, brethren” - again Paul tries to conclude! Let high and noble thoughts fill your mind. “True” must be taken in its broadest sense: Christ is Truth. He is Reality. “Noble” means “nobly serious.” Our thoughts must be reverent. “Right” means “righteous.” “Pure” means “chaste” or “unsullied.” “Lovely” is whatever calls forth love, the graciousness which wins or charms. “Admirable” means whatever rings true to the highest. Excellent” means “moral excellence.” “Praiseworthy” is the moral approbation from the practice of virtue. Put your mind on these things, says Paul, by constant and deliberate cultivation. By the power of the Spirit the Christian is able to “set” or “stay” his mind on these moral and spiritual values. This is “positive thinking,” and is the surest safeguard against the power of the enemy.

5. To High Endeavor (4:9)

As we must give ourselves to high thoughts, we must also give ourselves to high endeavor.

C. A FINAL WORD OF THANKS (4:10-19)

1. Delicate Appreciation (4:10)

Paul knew how to express his thanks graciously and delicately.

2. A Contented Spirit (4:11-13)

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Because Christ was the Strength of his life and the Source of all value, Paul had a certain indifference to material things. He could enjoy them or relinquish them at will, for he held things with a loose grasp. This is the fruit of true consecration.

3. Courteous Thanks (4:14-18)

This does not mean Paul did not appreciate the thoughtfulness of the Philippians. Indeed, they had always been generous to him. But his deep satisfaction arose, not from the gift, but from the spirit which had prompted the gift. He knew their offering had been a thank offering to God.

4. Riches in Glory (4:19)

Because the Philippians were so generous, God would certainly display the same generosity on their behalf. "We cannot out-give God." (4:20-23)

The time has come to say goodbye. The letter is to be read to the whole church. "Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus." Joining with Paul are the "saints" who are with him, "chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." This reminds us our sainthood is a matter of our relationship with Christ rather than of our circumstances.

Paul's last word is "grace," as was his first (1:2). It is grace from beginning to end.

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Macedon [MA-suh-daan]
Alexander [AL-ex-an-der]
Macedonia [MAS-uh-DOH-nee-uh]
Aegean [uh-JEE-uhn]
Egnatian [ay-eeg-NAY-suhn]
Octavian [aak-TAY-vee-uhn]
Brutus [BROO-tuhs]
Cassius [KA-see-uhs]
Praetorian Guard [pree-TAW-ree-uhn gaard]
Epaphroditus [eh-PA-froh-dai-tuhs]
Judaism [JOO-dee-i-zm]
antinomianism [AN-ti-noh-mee-n-is-m]
Judaizers [JEW-duh-ie-zerz]
libation [lai-BAY-shn]
Judaistic [JOO-duh-is-tik]
Abrahamic [ay-bruh-HA-muhk]
Hellenistic [heh-luh-NI-stik]
Palestine [PAL-uh-styn]
Jerusalem [juh-REW-suh-lum]
Antinomians [AN-ti-noh-mee-nz]

CHAPTER 3

Paul's Letter to the Colossians



NOTES

SECTION 3.1 BACKGROUND TO COLOSSIANS

A. THE CITY OF COLOSSE

Colosse was a city of Phrygia [FRI-jee-uh], situated on the Lycus [LAI-kuhs] River and on the main highway between Ephesus [EH-fuh-suhs] and the Euphrates [yoo-FRAY-teez]. Laodicea [lay-ow-duh-SEE-uh] and Hierapolis [her-RA-poh-luhs] were neighboring cities (2:1; 4:13). The Colossian population consisted not only of native Phrygians [FRI-jee-uh-nz] but also of Greek settlers and Jewish colonists.

B. THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE

The church at Colosse had not been founded by Paul but by one of his assistants, Epaphras [ep-uh-FRUS] (2:7), during the apostle's ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19). The Lycus Valley was evangelized during this time, and although Paul had not been able to visit these churches personally he maintained a close relationship with them.

C. CIRCUMSTANCES OF WRITING

Epaphras visited Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (4:18), bringing him news of the church at Colosse (2:7-8). Much of this news was good, but there was a disturbing note: a false teaching was springing up in Colosse which threatened the pure Christian faith and the spiritual freedom of these relatively new converts to Christ. Paul's purpose in writing was largely to correct this error and to strengthen the faith of the Colossians to withstand this negative force.

A comparison of the personal greetings in Colossians (4:7-15) with those in Ephesians (4:20-21) and Philemon (vv. 23-24) shows a close interrelatedness between these letters. All of them originated during Paul's imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 59-60) and were probably sent together by Tychicus and Onesimus, along with a letter to Laodicea [lay-aa-duh-SEE-uh] (4:16), thought to be the same as Ephesians.

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D. THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

All we know of the so-called Colossian heresy we derive from a study of this letter. However, it appears to be an early form of what came to be known as Gnosticism (Green gnosis = “knowledge”), a theosophy that combined various Greek, Jewish, and Christian features of belief. During the second century Gnosticism [NAHS-tuh-SIZ-um] threatened the very existence of the Christian faith. The roots of this false philosophy (2:8) are surely found in Colossians.

Basically, the Colossian heresy was Jewish. This is shown by the part played in it by ordinances, circumcision, dietary regulations, the new moon and Sabbath, angels, and other Jewish prescriptions (2:16-23). We know from other sources that the Judaism of Phrygia was considered unorthodox by the Jews of Palestine, probably because of its admixture with pagan beliefs and practices. It would seem that some of these Phrygian [FRI-jee-uhn] Jewish teachers combined their doctrine with some of the features of the Christian gospel. The result was what we call “the Colossian heresy.”

A decisive place was given to the angels through whom the law was given (see Galatians 3:19). These angels were ranked as “thrones,” “dominions,” “principalities,” and “powers” (1:16) and altogether constituted the “fullness” of the divine essence which bridged the gap between “the invisible God” (1:15) and this world. Moreover, since they were the agents through which the law had been given, a scrupulous keeping of the law was a tribute to them. The knowledge of God and salvation was therefore by:

- i. angel worship and
- ii. the punishment of the body through ceremonial observances (2:18-21).

Where Christ fitted into this scheme it is hard to say. It set aside the uniqueness of Christ and substituted the hierarchy of angels for him who is the only “mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5). Since these teachers believed that matter was evil, they denied Jesus’ true bodily existence and therefore his death and resurrection. Thus, they had no doctrine of atonement. This assortment was presented as a form of advanced “wisdom” and “knowledge,” recommended for those who would rise by this route to “perfection.”

E. PAUL’S ANSWER

Although this “impressive” philosophy appealed to a certain religious temperament, Paul condemned it as so much nonsense (2:18). He recognized it “the tradition of men” (2:8), against which must be set the true doctrine of



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Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3). His answer in one word is CHRIST. The exposition of the letter will give his answer in detail. The lengthy introduction to this false teaching is necessary as a key to understanding what the apostle is driving at as he sets forth the inspired doctrine of the person and work of Christ.

F. VALUE OF THE LETTER

In replying to the Colossian heresy Paul develops the doctrine of the cosmic Christ more fully than in any of his previous letters. It is not a “new” doctrine, but an expansion of what we find in germ form in the earlier writings. If in Galatians, Romans, and I and 2 Corinthians we find the doctrine of salvation through Christ delineated, here we find Paul’s Christology. Let us study Colossians, therefore, with this in mind, “that we may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” and that we may find in Christ the key of all truth.

SECTION 3.2 PERSONAL INTRODUCTION (1: 1-8)

A. SALUTATION (1: 1-2)

Paul alone was the Colossians’ apostle, even though he had not visited them (1:1). Timothy is at his side (see also Philippians 1:1). For the meaning of “saints”, and the significance of this salutation, see (1:2).

B. THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER FOR THE COLOSSIANS (1:3-8)

Paul’s intercessory prayers are instructive (1:3; see also Philippians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Philemon 4). Paul thanks God for the Colossians’ faith, love, and hope (1:4-5; this is a familiar triad of graces: 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; 1 Corinthians 13:13).

The emphasis here on hope reminds us of the future aspect of salvation. We have been saved (Ephesians 2:8; we are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18); we shall be saved (Romans 5:9; 13:11; 1 Peter 1:5). The word “hope” is a very strong word meaning “expectation,” and is an important factor in our salvation (Romans 8:24-25). Paul’s motto might well have been: “The whole gospel for the whole world” (1:6). Epaphras, through whom the Colossians had learned of Christ, remained as their pastor. His concern for their spiritual welfare led him to make a trip to Rome to see Paul (1:7-8). Although Epaphras is a shortened form of Epaphroditus, it is not likely that this is the Epaphroditus of Philippians.

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SECTION 3.3 THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST (1:9 - 2:7)

A. PAUL'S PRAYER THAT THE COLOSSIANS MAY INCREASE IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF GOD REVEALED IN CHRIST (1:9-23)

1. A Prayer for Their Progress in Christ (1:9-14)

Paul's prayer for them is that they might have that practical spiritual wisdom that would enable them to live well pleasing to the Lord. They were in danger of being seduced into a false intellectualism, which is always an enemy of true faith and holiness. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (see 1 Corinthians 8:1). The true knowledge of Christ which Paul is desirous of imparting does not "puff up the fleshly mind" (2:18). The gospel is not designed to satisfy our intellectual curiosity but to produce a harvest of good works (1:10). It strengthens us to demonstrate patience and long-suffering with joy (1:11).

In Christ, theology is grace and ethics is gratitude (1:12). Such gratitude is understandable when we consider that God has fitted us to share the inheritance of his holy people (1:12). This inheritance is a realm of light, illuminated by the Sun of Righteousness shining in the hearts of his people. As believers we are here and now living in the kingdom of God's beloved Son (1:13).

The kingdom of Christ has a twofold aspect in the New Testament. It has already broken into the world by the work of Christ; it will be consummated by His return in glory. Because we are now in the Kingdom we enjoy liberation from our sins (1:14).

2. Christ, Lord of Creation (1:15-17)

We come now to one of the great Christological passages of the New Testament. Yet, high as this passage is, it is identical with John 1:1-18 and Hebrews 1:1-3. Paul is setting forth the common faith of the primitive Church.

- a. He is "the image of the invisible God" (1:15; see also 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 1:18; Hebrews 1:3). He could say, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:6).
- b. He is the pre-existent Creator of all things (1:15-16). The phrase "the firstborn of every creature" cannot mean that He was the first creature; that would make nonsense of what Paul goes on to say. Christ stands with us. In substance Paul writes, "Name all the angelic powers you wish – thrones or dominions or whatever – Christ is greater than them all, for He is the Creator of all there is." (see John 1:3.)
- c. He is the End of creation; all things were created "for him." In Christ the eternal purpose of God will find its fulfillment.

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- d. Finally He is “before all things, and in him all things hold together” (1:17). He maintains in being what He has brought into being. He is the cosmic Christ.

3. Christ, Head of the Church (1:18)

The *whole Christ* is here presented to us. Christ and the Church are viewed together as Head and body, as a living unit. Christ is now manifest in the world in his body, the Church. That body exists to obey him as our bodies exist to do the bidding of our minds. The life which vitalizes the Church is Christ’s resurrection life, which He shares with his people.

The *risen Christ* is “the beginning and the firstborn in resurrection as well as creation. His resurrection marked his triumph over all the forces which held people in bondage. Easter morning was a new day for the whole world. Now Christ is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29), “the first fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Because He lives we shall live also.

4. Christ, the Reconciler (1:19-23)

a. Reconciler of “all things” (1:19-20)

- i. The pre-eminence of Christ is presented in a different way, designed to appeal to the Colossians. In Christ the “fulness” of the Godhead was present. “Fulness” was a technical term used by the Colossian heretics for the totality of the intermediary powers they supposed emanated from God and ruled over humankind. Paul undermines the whole scheme by declaring that *the totality of divine power resides in Christ*. He is the only Mediator between God and people, and in him all the attributes of God are displayed (see 2 Corinthians 5:19).
- ii. In Christ, God has reconciled to himself all things in earth and heaven. The cosmic Christ has effected a universal reconciliation (see Ephesians 1:10). This does not mean universal salvation for angels and people, as some have supposed. In 2:15 where Christ is said to have “spoiled principalities and powers”, they are certainly not depicted as gladly surrendering to his grace but as submitting against their wills to a power they cannot resist. In his reconciliation, both the demonic forces of the universe and sinful men on earth have been decisively subdued to the will of God, and can but help to further him, whether they choose or not. Thus “things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” ultimately unite to bow at the name of Jesus and acknowledge him as Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). This is not universal salvation but universal pacification.

b. Reconciler of his people (1:21-23)

As those who had once been estranged from God but who now enjoy “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” the Colossian Christians are encouraged to “continue in the faith” so that they might ultimately

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be presented to the Father “holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight.” They were in danger of turning away from the true Mediator to the spurious intermediaries. Clearly, to do so would be to fail and be lost. Only those who persevere in faith will be saved.

At the heart of this reconciliation is the death of Christ in a body of flesh (1:22). The Colossian teachers had no place for such an idea. Any doctrine that fails here is false, for the very core of the gospel is that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.”

B. PAUL'S STEWARDSHIP OF THE GOSPEL (1:24-29)

1. Filling up Christ's Afflictions (1:24)

Christ must be viewed both as an individual and as a corporate Personality (1:18). In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was the servant of the Lord (Isaiah 49:3); but Israel became disobedient and the prophecy of the Servant's triumph through suffering found its fulfillment in one Person, in whom the ideally obedient Israel was realized. The identity of the Servant was gradually narrowed until it was concentrated in our Lord alone; but since his exaltation his identity is widened to take in his whole body, the Church. “In my sufferings,” says Paul, “I am fulfilling the passion of Christ.” In one sense the atonement is finished: He suffered once for all “in the body of his flesh through death” (1:22). But in his body, the Church, his redemptive sufferings continue, in order to carry forward the ministry of reconciliation (see also 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

2. The Mystery of God (1:25-27)

Paul now enlarges upon the message with which he has been entrusted. It is a “mystery.” In the New Testament this means something formerly concealed but now revealed. The people of God under the old covenant knew nothing of this mystery, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The Old Testament prophets foresaw the saving purpose of God in Christ and predicted that it would embrace Gentiles as well as Israel; but the incorporation of gentile and Jewish believers into the one body of Christ was not made known to them.

3. Paul's Gospel (1:28-29)

- a. His *message* was Christ (3:11).
- b. His *method* included:
 - i. Preaching - the proclamation of God's saving acts in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Romans 10: 9-10; Romans 4:24-25).
 - ii. Admonition - a warning of God's impending judgment (see 2 Corinthians 5:10-11).
 - iii. Teaching - instruction in the meaning of Christian faith and life (for

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example, this letter).

- c. His *motive* was: "that we may present every person perfect in Christ Jesus." "Perfect" - no limit extensively; "every person" - no limit intensively; "in Christ Jesus" - no limit dynamically.
- d. His *might* was the enabling power of the Lord (1:29).

Paul's *gospel* was "*the whole gospel for the whole world.*" The Colossian heretics aimed at bringing a select company of the spiritually elite to a perfection of wisdom and knowledge, by leading them through various stages of initiation. Paul's aim was to bring every believer to complete Christlikeness of character, through faith and love.

C. PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE CHRISTIANS OF COLOSSE AND LAODICEA (2:1-5)

Paul is in "great conflict" for all the Christians of the Lycus Valley (2:1). They are in grave danger of being induced into an erroneous intellectualism. Paul is saying what John Wesley said later: If our quest is for anything other than more love we are "out of the royal way" (2:2). Why is this so? Because Christ is the clue to ultimate reality. *In him* are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). What we see in Christ is both the Most High and the Most Real. The heart of the universe is holy love; and the more we love, the deeper we penetrate into the essence of reality. The world by wisdom never guessed this; this truth came to the world through Christ, who is "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:19-25). Christianity is therefore the true *gnosis*, the final philosophy.

Yet how captivating the wisdom of this world (2:4)! Evidently it was being presented in the Colossian church by some persuasive but egotistical teacher (2:4, 8, 16, 18). Thank God, the Colossians had not yet succumbed (2:5).

D. PAUL'S EXHORTATION TO THESE CHRISTIANS (2:6-7)

In a word Paul exhorts, "Go on as you have begun. Send the roots of your faith deep down into the truth as it is in Jesus. Be sure that truth is the foundation upon which you build whatever philosophy you hold." Since Christ is Truth (John 14:6), the true philosophy is an organic whole. Whatever does not accord with the divine revelation in Christ is untrue.

SECTION 3.4 THE COLOSSIAN HERESY AND PAUL'S ANSWER (2:8 - 3:4)

A. CHRIST IS THE ANSWER (2:8-15)

1. To False Philosophy



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False philosophy is the “vain deceit” that fails to find in Christ the full disclosure of God (2:8-9). False philosophy would seduce us from “the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

2. To Spiritual Completeness

Not only is Christ the “fulness” of Deity become flesh, but also in him we discover our completeness (2:10); for Christ has primacy over “all principality and power” by virtue of the fact that, in addition to having created them (1:15-16), He has also triumphed over them in his cross (2:10, 15).

3. To Release from Sin

Through Christ we have full release from sin (2:10-13). We learn from him that our root problem is not ignorance but sin.

- a. In Christ we have true circumcision (2:11). In him we do not put off a small piece of flesh but the whole “body of flesh.” The “body of flesh” is equivalent to “the old man” in 3:9. By our union with Christ we have put off “the whole personality organized for, and geared into rebellion against God.”
- b. In baptism we confessed our death with Christ to sin and our resurrection with him to new life (2:12; see also Romans 6:3). Note, the power of the new life is not in baptism but faith (2:12).
- c. The divine power through which we were resurrected from sin is the selfsame power which raised Christ from the grave and exalted him to the Father’s right hand (2:13; see also Ephesians 1:19-20; 2:4-6).

4. To the Bondage of Law

Moreover, Christ has blotted out our debt to the Mosaic law, nailing its ordinances to his cross and canceling its claims upon us (2:14). In the same act He triumphed over the “principalities and powers” of the Colossian heresy, exposing these forces as the demonic intelligences who engineered the death of Christ and spoiling their power (2:15). Thus, Christ has delivered us from “the evil coalition” of the Mosaic law and the demonic forces of spiritual darkness. These two parties - the demons and the devotees of the law - “crucified the Lord of glory” but in the very act of destroying him destroyed themselves (1 Corinthians 2:8). Thus, our Lord “led captivity captive” and delivered mankind from bondage to sin and the law.

B. MAINTAIN YOUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST (2:16-19)

1. Liberty Is Costly

Since your liberty has been purchased at such terrific cost, utterly disregard those who would bring you back under the servitude of ritual rules and calendar regulations (2:16). The whole body of the ceremonial law was but a

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passing shadow of the full reality we now enjoy in Christ (2:17).

2. Avoid Spiritual Pride

Do not be enticed into ascetic self-denial and angel worship (2:18). This is really a piece of spiritual conceit, the product of “the mind of the flesh” (2:18). The self-inflation and spiritual pride of such super-religion comes from not maintaining contact with Christ (2:19). Teachers who promote this kind of religiosity have no real part in the body of Christ (2:19).

C. CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR DEATH WITH CHRIST (2:20-23)

1. The Old Life Has Ceased

Paul has already made it clear that his readers had participated in the death of Christ (2:11). Now he applies this fact in a practical way. You died with Christ, he writes; therefore your former relation to the “rudiments of the world” and such legal ordinances as “Touch not; taste not; handle not;” is severed. That old life, dominated by the endless list of “don’ts,” has ceased (2:20-21). After all, it is not what a person eats that counts, or what one does not eat; for food, once eaten, ceases to be food (2:22). Such ritualism is the doctrine of people (see Mark 7:7-23). (For Paul’s positive position see Romans 14:17-18.)

2. The Danger of Legalism

I admit, Paul continues, this asceticism and strict legalism have the appearance of high spirituality and make an impression on many people, but they get you exactly nowhere. They are of no value in the real struggle with the “flesh” (2:23). The truth of the matter is, the pride which accompanies such stern legalism is the subtlest and most damning manifestation of “the mind of the flesh” (2:18), for the “flesh” is the whole personality cut off from God and set up to promote its own interests. On the one hand, it manifests itself as wickedness; on the other, as pride. But in either case, it is self-promotion. This is why legalism cannot save. Even if it succeeds in checking sensual indulgence (and it rarely does), it simply refines sin into spiritual pride and self-righteousness (the very sins that crucified Jesus). This is the dilemma of the legalist.

Since you have died with Christ, therefore be done with all self-salvation. Our faith must be in the operation of God rather than our human ability. Christ, teach us the rest of faith. “There remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own works, just as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:9-10).

**D. CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR RESURRECTION WITH CHRIST
(3:1-4)**



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1. Christ Is the Center of Your Interest

Paul continues: "Not only did you die with Christ; you were raised with him from the dead" (2:12-13). "When Christ was raised He was exalted to the right hand of God. What does this mean to you? It means that since you have "risen with Christ" your interests henceforth must center in him, your affections must be "set...on things above" (3:1-2).

2. Our Existence Is Bound up in Him

When Christ died, we died with him. If we are really in him, our existence is so bound up with him that we can say, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (3:3; Galatians 2:20).

"With Christ - in God." As F. F. BRUCE has noted: "With Christ, because we died with him and have been raised to new life with him. In God, because Christ himself has his being in God, and therefore those who belong to Christ have their being there too."

3. We Shall Share in His Redemption

When Christ appears in his final glory, we shall share in his complete redemption (3:4; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2). Since we have risen with Christ and our life is hidden with him in God, let us live the risen life of heavenly aspiration and blessed expectation.

SECTION 3.5 THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (3:5 - 4:6)

Now we come to a more detailed application of doctrine to life. "Therefore" marks a significant transition in emphasis between doctrine and ethics. From this point on, Paul's interest is practical. What does the doctrine of Christ mean in the outworking of our everyday existence in this world?

A. "PUT OFF" (3:5-9)

You have said goodbye to the old life; therefore be done with it utterly. Make your death to sin and your putting off of "the old man" an experiential and practical reality.

1. "Put to Death"

"Put to death ... your earthly nature" (3:5-7). This passage is a highly concentrated summary of Romans 6-8. Many questions we ask Paul omits to answer. (See Romans 6 - 8 in *Search the Scriptures*, for the theological implications of this truth.) From Romans we may sketch in broad outline what is implied here.

a. First, we must

- i. "reckon" ourselves "TO BE dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God



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through Jesus Christ our Lord" in a faith that accounts that we are heirs of all for which Christ died (Romans 6:11); and

- ii. "yield" ourselves "unto God, as those that are alive from the dead," and "our members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13). This is the *crisis* of consecration and faith which becomes entire sanctification when we "let go and let God" utterly possess us by the Spirit.
- b. Having experienced this infilling of the Spirit, we must go on putting to death the deeds of the body by the indwelling Spirit (Romans 8:13, present tense). Out of Christ this is impossible, for in that state sin "dwells" in us and uses our bodies as its instrument (Romans 7:14-25). But in this rich faith-union with Christ the Holy Spirit "dwells" in us and gives us complete freedom of expression to glorify God in our bodies (Romans 8:8-9; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This, however, is not automatic; it requires self-discipline (1 Corinthians 9:27). It is, however, gloriously possible (Romans 8:1-4).
- c. The body and its impulses, we see, are morally neutral. By nature, they are subject to sin; by grace, they may be subject to the Spirit. The impulses of the body know neither right nor wrong; they seek only indulgence. When we are living in the Spirit they are under control, but they still register themselves as impulses. To put these impulses to death is not to suppress sin, for the body is *not* sinful per se. To say that these "members which are upon the earth" are essentially sinful would be to agree with the very heretics Paul is refuting. They denied Christ a true bodily existence for this very reason that they believed matter was evil. As Christ lived a holy life in a human body, so may we - in the Spirit. It is this which Paul is enjoining upon the Colossians. It all grows out of their death and resurrection with Christ.

2. Put off the Old Nature

"Rid yourselves of all such things...since you have taken off your old self" (3:8-9). Since you have put off "the old self" - your old self organized for and geared into rebellion against God - put off all the characteristics of that old nature. It is the same process sketched in the previous section, only here it is not the sense impulses so much as the *self-impulses* Paul has in mind. As our appetitive nature must be controlled in the power of the Spirit, so must our *natural self-love* be balanced by "the love of God" shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit.

B. "PUT ON" (3:10-17)

1. The Image of Christ

The imperative, "Put on," is predicated on the fact that we have already put on Christ. We must appropriate and express what is already ours in Christ.



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- a. We have put on Christ (3:10). He is the new Adam in whom the image of God is restored: in him God's holy love is perfectly reflected. By virtue of our faith in him we are "being renewed" (the force of the verb, 3:10) in the same image. (This process is vividly described in 2 Corinthians 3:18; see also 2 Corinthians 4:16.) The whole race is reconstituted in Christ as the new Adam, and in him all human barriers are obliterated (3:11). Christ is the Image of God in which we have been re-created and in which we are being renewed.
- b. Now we must actually "put on" Christ by giving expression to his Spirit (3:12-14). Each of these virtues is an aspect of Christlikeness. Love is the quality that binds them all together.

2. The Attitudes That Are Christlike

The double occurrence of "let" is instructive also (3:15-17). When we "let" Christ's peace arbitrate in our relationships one with another (3:15), when we "let" his Word dwell in us richly through meditation and reflection and then give expression to that Word in song (3:16), we are giving expression to our new nature, giving expression to what is deepest within us since we have "put on the new man." Notice, Christian singing is a means of "teaching" and "admonishing one another" in the church. When a church is spiritually alive, its singing is spontaneous. "Psalms" were drawn from the Psalter; "hymns" were Christian odes of praise to Christ and God; "spiritual songs" were probably unpremeditated words sung in the Spirit, voicing holy aspirations.

3. A Desire to Glorify Christ

Every act of life is caught up in our grateful effort to glorify Christ (3:17).

C. "SUBMIT YOURSELVES" (3:18 - 4:1)

The Christian pattern is one of subordination. The Bible recognizes that freedom requires discipline and the restraint of order. Society, like an army, needs sergeants and captains and generals as well as privates. The Christian Church is to be a pattern for society. Within its fellowship, submission becomes mutual - "out of reverence for Christ". (For an extended treatment of this material see the comments on Ephesians 5:21-6:9 in *Search the Scriptures*.)

D. "WATCH AND PRAY" (4:2-6)

1. Prayer and Thanksgiving

Prayer and thanksgiving can never be dissociated from each other in the Christian life (4:2). The remembrance of former mercies produces spontaneous praise; it is also a powerful inducement to renewed believing prayer. We are to persevere in prayer, maintaining a constant watchfulness therein.

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2. Prayer for Paul's Ministry

"Pray for us," Paul writes, thinking of his companions he is about to enumerate; "but pray" especially for me, that I "may proclaim" the gospel "clearly" (see 4:3-4).

3. Witness as Opportunity Affords

"Be careful to maintain your Christian example before the unbelieving world, buying up every opportunity to witness for your Lord" (4:5).

4. Speak with Christian Care

And be sure that your speech has the saving grace of a pointed witness (4:6). At the trial of Justin Martyr and his companions, in the early Second Century we have an example of what Paul here means. "No right-thinking person," said Justin, "turns away from true belief to false." "Do what you will," say his companions, "for we are Christians, and Christians do not offer sacrifice to idols."

SECTION 3.6 PERSONAL MATTERS (4:7-17)

A. PAUL'S MESSENGERS (4:7-9)

Tychicus (4:7-8) was evidently the bearer of the Ephesian letter (Ephesians 6:21) and possibly of a letter to the Laodiceans [lay-aa-duh-SEE-uhnz] also (4:16). Onesimus (4:9) was a slave of Philemon, a member of the Colossian church (see also Philemon, in this volume).

B. GREETINGS FROM PAUL'S COMPANIONS (4:10-14)

Greetings are now sent to the Colossians from six Christian men with Paul as he writes this letter.

1. Jewish Companions

Three of these men are Jews – Aristarchus [eh-ruh-STAAR-kuhs], Mark, and Jesus Justus (4:10-11). Aristarchus was a native of Thessalonica [teh-suh-LAA-nuh-kuh]. He was with Paul at Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Later he accompanied Paul to Jerusalem as one of two delegates sent by the Thessalonians [teh-suh-LOW-nynz] (Acts 20:4). He accompanied Paul, along with Luke when the apostle set sail from Caesarea [seh-suh-REE-uh] for Rome (Acts 27:2). He is now, probably voluntarily, Paul's "fellow prisoner" (4:10a).

It is from this passage alone we learn that Mark is Barnabas' "cousin". References to Mark are numerous in the New Testament (Acts 13:4-5, 13; 15:36-39; 2 Timothy 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13; possibly, Mark 14:51-52). Of Jesus, surnamed Justus, we know nothing more than that he was a Jewish Christian



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with Paul at the time he was writing this letter.

2. Gentile Companions

The other three of Paul's companions are Gentiles - Epaphras, Luke, and Demas [dee-mahs] (4:12-14). Epaphras we have already met (1:7-8). Paul is struck by his prayer labors on behalf of the Colossians. Epaphras shared Paul's burden for the Colossians (4:12, with 1:28). From here alone we know that Luke was a physician (4:14). Demas (4:14) is mentioned also in Philemon (v. 24). In 2 Timothy 4:10 we learn that Demas later "forsook" Paul, "having loved this present world."

C. VARIOUS GREETINGS (4:15-17)

Paul now asks the Colossians to convey his greetings to the Christians in the neighboring cities. The reference in 4:16 to "the letter from Laodicea" is thought to be the same letter Paul sent to the Ephesians. Marcion [MAAR-see-uhn], a teacher in Rome in the early part of the second century, spoke of our Ephesians as Laodiceans.

SECTION 3.7 FINAL GREETING AND BENEDICTION (4:18)

Paul signs his own signature to authenticate this letter (4:18). The reference to his bonds was probably a final reminder to pray for him: "Don't forget that I am a prisoner." With a brief benediction, he brings the letter to a close.

Phrygia [FRI-jee-uh]
Lycus [LAI-kuhs]
Ephesus [EH-fuh-suhs]
Euphrates [yoo-FRAY-teez]
Laodicea [lay-ow-duh-SEE-uh]
Hierapolis [her-RA-poh-luhs]
Phrygians [FRI-jee-uh-nz]
Epaphras [ep-uh-FRAS]
Gnosticism [NAHS-tuh-SIZ-um]
Phrygian [FRI-jee-uhn]
Laodiceans [lay-aa-duh-SEE-uhn]
Aristarchus [eh-ruh-STAAR-kuhs]
Thessalonica [theh-suh-LAA-nuh-kuh]
Thessalonians [theh-suh-LOW-nynz]
Caesarea [seh-suh-REE-uh]
Demas [dee-mahs]
Marcion [MAAR-see-uhn]

CHAPTER 4

Paul's Letter to Philemon



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SECTION 4.1 BACKGROUND TO PHILEMON

A. OCCASION

We come now to a dramatic moment in the life of Paul. That moment was the occasion when Paul was saying goodbye to a slave named Onesimus, who was taking leave of the apostle to return to his master in Colosse.

Onesimus had run away from his master. Somehow, he found his way to Paul, who won him to Christ. Apparently, he remained with Paul for some time, and a strong attachment was formed between the apostle and the young man. The letter implies that Paul and Onesimus had discussed whether it was morally necessary for him to return at all. When in the end they had reluctantly decided it was necessary, Paul wrote this letter. He addressed it to Onesimus' master, two other individuals, and to the church which met in one of their houses. It is clear that Paul was "a prisoner of Jesus Christ" when he wrote this letter. We believe it was during his first imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 59-60). The letter to Philemon was sent along with those to the Ephesians and Colossians, it would appear, by Tychicus and Onesimus (see also Colossians 4:7-17; Philemon 2:23-24).

B. PURPOSE

Why did Paul write this letter? The traditional view is that he wrote to persuade Onesimus' master to take him back into servitude without inflicting the severe penalties that the law allowed. Paul was pleading that the owner should welcome the slave as the Christian brother he has now become.

There are reasons, however, for believing that Paul had a deeper purpose than this, namely, to secure Onesimus for his service. Paul had not only become warmly attached to Onesimus; he had found him "useful" in his ministry. Onesimus means "useful" in Greek. The letter becomes a request, therefore, for the owner to send Onesimus back to continue his useful service at Paul's side.

Supporting this second point of view is the fact that the martyr Ignatius [uhg-NAY-shuhs], in a letter to the Christians at Ephesus in A.D. 110, refers to their bishop who was named Onesimus. Paul's Onesimus would not have been too old to have been bishop of Ephesus when Ignatius passed through Asia. That Onesimus was a man of promise is indicated by Paul's great concern to have him



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at his side. It would have been natural for places of leadership to pass on to Paul's companions in the churches that he had founded.

That this Onesimus was Paul's convert is made practically certain by Irgantius' reference in the letter to "your [thy, singular] much-beloved name, which you obtained by your righteous nature, according to faith and love in Christ Jesus our Savior." This is undoubtedly a reference to Paul's words about the slave in Philemon: "my son Onesimus ['Useful'], whom I have begotten in my bonds" (v. 10).

This letter, therefore, so unlike all the rest of Paul's letters, was preserved because Paul's request was granted. Onesimus was released to become one of the leaders in the post-apostolic Church, and Philemon was the document of his freedom!

C. VALUE

If the above view of the purpose of this letter is correct, Philemon became extremely valuable as a living link between Paul and the second-century Church in Asia Minor. It is also valuable as it indicates the Christian attitude toward the institution of slavery. It shows that Christianity was not simply a reform movement; nevertheless, it struck at the roots of the institution of slavery by making the converted slave "brother" to his master.

SECTION 4.2 SALUTATION (VV. 1-3)

A. THE WRITER (V. 1)

Paul's reference to himself as "a prisoner of Jesus Christ" probably has a double meaning. He is a prisoner (1) for Christ's sake and (2) in Christ's service.

In verse 23, Paul refers to Epaphras as "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus." The hint that he is thinking of himself as engaged in a war for Christ's sake and as now being a battle casualty is suggested by his reference to Archippus [ar-KI-puhs] (v. 2) as "our fellow soldier."

B. THE ADDRESSES (VV. 1-2)

It is generally said that Philemon and Apphia [AF-ee-uh] are husband and wife and that Archippus is their son. This, however, is only a supposition. "The church



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that meets in your home” raises the question, “Whose home?” Is it Philemon’s? This has always been supposed; but the singular pronoun (“thy”) may possibly refer to Archippus, who is mentioned just before the phrase. This would mean Onesimus was the slave of Archippus rather than Philemon. Then the reference to Archippus in Colossians 4:17 becomes meaningful: “And say to Archippus, ‘complete the work you have received in the Lord.’” Archippus’ “ministry” would be to “minister” to Paul by freeing Onesimus *to serve in Archippus’ stead* (see v. 13).

Do not overlook the fact that Philemon is more than a personal letter; it is addressed to the church as a whole. Paul means for the entire congregation to take seriously his request.

C. THE SALUTATION (V. 3)

“Grace” and “peace” mingle the Greek and Hebrew salutations, but grace always precedes and produces peace.

SECTION 4.3 THANKSGIVING (VV. 4-7)

A. A PROMINENT CHARACTERISTIC

Paul’s salutation is generally followed by a thanksgiving. Philemon is a typical Pauline letter, except that it contains no doctrinal section.

B. A COURTEOUS HABIT

The purpose of the thanksgiving is to establish a friendly relationship between Paul and the recipients of the letter so as to prepare the way for the request which is to follow. The reference to “faith in the Lord Jesus”, and “love for all the saints” as well as to be “active in sharing your faith” serve the same purpose. In the same way the reference to “have refreshed the hearts of the saints (v. 7) prepares the way for the appeal, “refresh my heart in Christ” (v. 20).

C. RECOGNIZES GOD AS GIVER

In passing, Paul reminds us that “every good thing” which is in us is “in Christ Jesus.” God only is good; our goodness is his gift to us in Christ.

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SECTION 4.4 PAUL'S REQUEST (VV. 8-22)

A. AN APPEAL IN LOVE (VV. 8-11)

Paul now comes to his request. As an apostle he might be "bold" to command "what you ought to do", but he chooses to make an appeal in love - as an "ambassador" ("an old man") and "prisoner of Christ Jesus" - "for" his son Onesimus (vv. 8-11).

1. Deliberately Difficult?

What is the force of the preposition "for" (v. 10)? Does it mean Paul is appealing for the sake of Onesimus, or is he asking for Onesimus? Either meaning is possible. Perhaps Paul is being deliberately ambiguous at this point.

2. Desires Onesimus' Return

There is no doubt, however, that Paul wants Onesimus returned to him (vv. 11-13). As Christ's ambassador, he could keep Onesimus, he is saying, but he prefers simply to ask for him "for love's sake" (v. 9).

3. Paul's Son in the Gospel

There can be no doubt that Onesimus had become a Christian under Paul's influence (v. 10). The Greek is a play on words. It reads literally: "I have begotten him to be 'useful.'" Paul is saying, in substance, "As *Onesimus* he is my own child; for before he was born again he was 'useless' to you, but now he is 'useful' to me as well as to you."

B. URGES ONESIMUS TO RETURN (VV. 12-14)

"And now that I send him back to you, it is like sending my own heart" (v. 12, Goodspeed). Paul "would have retained" Onesimus that in his master's place he might serve the apostle (v. 13). The Greek suggests not only that Paul wanted to keep Onesimus but that he actually considered doing so. In the end, however, he determined not to exercise what he felt was his clear apostolic right (v. 8), but rather give Onesimus' owner an opportunity to act on his own volition and judgment (v. 14).

C. GOD'S PROVIDENCE REVEALED (VV. 15-16)

NOTES

Paul goes on to suggest that there may have been a providence in Onesimus' temporary absence: "Now you are to have him back forever - *not any longer as your slave but as a brother in Christ*" (see vv. 15-16). Losing a slave, he was gaining a brother in the Lord. This is the seed that finally split the rock of slavery.

D. PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL (V. 17)

Paul makes his request on the basis of the fact that he and Onesimus' owner are partners in the gospel (v. 17). "Partner" is a business term. The gospel was their common enterprise as Christians.

E. ASSUMES HIS DEBTS (VV. 18-19)

It was customary when a slave was passed to another, or was freed, for any debts or penalties against him to be assumed by the new owner or by the slave himself. Paul is here assuming Onesimus' debts (v. 18). Paul gives his legal bond - followed by a gentle reminder that his offer should not be accepted (v.19)!

F. SOME REMUNERATION DESIRED (V. 20)

Paul now uses a verbal form of "Onesimus": literally, "I want some 'benefit' from you" (v. 20). This becomes clear if Onesimus is himself the "benefit" Paul is seeking.

G. A CONCLUDING REQUEST (VV. 21-22)

The apostle concludes his request with an expression of complete confidence in his friend's "obedience" and a request that he prepare a guest room for his (Paul's) approaching expected visit (vv. 21-22). This indicates Paul's expectation of being released from prison (see also Philippians 1:23-26).

SECTION 4.5 FINAL GREETINGS (VV. 23-25)

A. FOR PAUL'S COMPANIONS (VV. 23-24)

See comments on Colossians 4:12-14.

NOTES

B. BENEDICTION (V. 25)

The brief letter concludes with a characteristic benediction.

Ignatius [uhg-NAY-shuhs]

Archippus [ar-KI-puhs]

Apphia [AF-ee-uh]

STUDY QUESTIONS



NOTES

CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND

1. What group of Paul's letters does Philippians belong to?
 - A. psalms
 - B. proverbs
 - C. prison
 - D. none of these
2. What group of Paul's letters does Colossians belong to?
 - A. psalms
 - B. prison
 - C. proverbs
 - D. none of these
3. What group of Paul's letters does Philemon belong to?
 - A. prison
 - B. proverbs
 - C. psalms
 - D. none of these
4. Which of Paul's prison epistles was probably written first?
 - A. Ephesians
 - B. Colossians
 - C. Philippians
 - D. Philemon
5. Where was Paul when he wrote Philippians?
 - A. Jerusalem
 - B. Antioch
 - C. Samaria
 - D. Rome

NOTES

CHAPTER 2. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

6. Philippians has been called a "spontaneous utterance of Christian love and gratitude."
A. True
B. False
7. All New Testament believers are "saints."
A. True
B. False
8. The deacons in Philippians were also called "elders" or "presbyters."
A. True
B. False
9. The "overseers" of the flock of God were also called "ministers" or "servants" in Philippians.
A. True
B. False
10. Which was part of Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians in 1:3-4?
A. gratitude
B. memory
C. supplication
D. all of these
11. Which was part of Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians in 1:5-8?
A. co-operation
B. longing
C. confidence
D. all of these
12. A growing Christian learns to "test the things that differ".
A. True
B. False
13. When Paul speaks of the Philippians living "without offence" he means they were to live so as not to cause another to stumble.
A. True
B. False

NOTES

14. What was true of Paul's ministry while in prison?
 - A. Paul's bonds attracted attention to Christ and gave him an opportunity to preach Christ to all who were interested.
 - B. Paul preached to each soldier who was chained to him.
 - C. Paul made converts among the Praetorian Guard.
 - D. all of these
15. Which was true about the Judaizers in Philippians?
 - A. They preached Christ with pure motives.
 - B. They were faithful to Christ.
 - C. They insisted on baptism as the "seal of saving faith."
 - D. none of these
16. What was true about Paul's earnest hope?
 - A. He knew that everything that was happening would contribute to his "salvation" in the highest sense.
 - B. He knew that trials develop Christlikeness and become the pathway to heaven.
 - C. He knew that for the saint there is a "supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."
 - D. all of these
17. Paul's dilemma in Philippians 1:22-26 was:
 - A. the extreme pull of *desire*
 - B. purely *duty* to his friends
 - C. the pull of *desire* on the one hand and *duty* on the other
 - D. all of these
18. Which was true about Paul's view of "heavenly citizens?"
 - A. Under all circumstances they conduct themselves as good citizens.
 - B. They are part of the "colony of heaven".
 - C. They stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.
 - D. all of these
19. What is true of Paul's powerful incentives to unity for the Philippians?
 - A. a true experience of Christ
 - B. powerful love
 - C. communion with the Spirit
 - D. all of these

NOTES

20. Christ is the great pattern of humility.
A. Yes
B. No
21. Paul encouraged the Philippians to imitate the Judaizers.
A. True
B. False
22. Which is true of Paul's discussion with the Philippians about Christ's pre-existent glory?
A. The Son was in the form of God.
B. Before He became flesh the Son shared in the very nature of God.
C. The Son partook of the divine glory.
D. all of these
23. Which is true of Paul's presentation of the "name which is above every name"?
A. It is the name *Lord*.
B. The true Christian confession is "Jesus is Lord."
C. We offer praise and homage to our Creator.
D. all of these
24. The salvation we are commanded to "work out" is justification.
A. True
B. False
25. Our salvation must be "complete" before we stand "perfected in Christ."
A. True
B. False
26. Our salvation from first to last is a response to God's grace.
A. True.
B. False
27. Fellowship is a blessed reality, even when it demands the supreme sacrifice.
A. True
B. False
28. Which is true of Timothy's single-minded love?
A. Timothy's life was Christ-centered.
B. Others came before "self."

NOTES

- C. It was like Paul's.
 - D. all of these
29. Which was true of the erroneous doctrine of the Judaizers?
- A. They advocated the "circumcision of the heart."
 - B. They agreed with Paul about the "true circumcision."
 - C. They put their confidence in the carnal ordinance of circumcision.
 - D. none of these
30. What kinds of righteousness did Paul compare in Philippians 3:9?
- A. only privilege and achievement
 - B. only God's grace and faith in Christ
 - C. man's righteousness and God's righteousness
 - D. none of these
31. Which was true of Paul's warning against antinomians?
- A. They taught that the believer is free only from the ceremonial law.
 - B. They taught that the believer is not free from the moral law.
 - C. They agreed with Paul's ideal of complete Christlikeness.
 - D. none of these
32. Paul did not talk to the Philippians about the perfection of Christian believers.
- A. True
 - B. False
33. Paul affirmed that only preachers need to be "worthy of emulation."
- A. True
 - B. False
34. Paul claimed citizens of the kingdom of God are awaiting the return of our King.
- A. True
 - B. False
35. In Paul's appeal to unity among the Philippians, who did he plead with to agree with each other in the Lord?
- A. Euodia and Timothy
 - B. Syntyche and Timothy
 - C. Euodia and Syntyche
 - D. Timothy and Titus

NOTES

CHAPTER 3. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

36. Who probably founded the Church at Colosse?
- A. Paul
 - B. Timothy
 - C. Epaphras
 - D. Luke
37. Which is true of the circumstances of Paul's writing to the Colossians?
- A. Epaphras visited Paul during his imprisonment in Rome.
 - B. Paul was brought news of the church at Colosse.
 - C. A false teaching was springing up in Colosse.
 - D. all of these
38. Which is true of the Colossian heresy?
- A. It involved ordinances.
 - B. It involved circumcision.
 - C. It involved dietary regulations.
 - D. all of these
39. In replying to the Colossian heresy Paul develops the doctrine of the cosmic Christ more fully than in any of his previous letters.
- A. True
 - B. False
40. Paul alone was the Colossians' apostle, even though he had not visited them.
- A. True
 - B. False
41. Which is true of Paul's thanksgiving for the Colossians?
- A. their faith
 - B. their love
 - C. their hope
 - D. all of these
42. The word "hope" is a very strong word meaning:
- A. faith
 - B. hope
 - C. expectation
 - D. love

NOTES

43. Which is true of Paul's concern for the Colossians' progress in Christ?
- A. that they might have practical spiritual wisdom
 - B. that they would be able to live well pleasing to the Lord
 - C. that they would recognize the danger of being seduced into a false intellectualism
 - D. all of these
44. The gospel is not designed to satisfy our intellectual curiosity but to produce a harvest of good works.
- A. True
 - B. False
45. Which is true of Paul's Christological presentation in Colossians 1:15-17?
- A. Christ is "the image of the invisible God."
 - B. Christ is the pre-existent Creator of all things.
 - C. Christ is the End of creation; all things were created "for him."
 - D. all of these
46. Christ is now manifest in the world in his body, the Church.
- A. True
 - B. False
47. Paul affirmed to the Colossians that Paul is the only Mediator between God and people.
- A. True
 - B. False
48. In Colossians 1:20, Paul affirms a universal salvation for angels and people.
- A. True
 - B. False
49. Paul encouraged the Colossians to "continue in the faith" so that they might ultimately be presented to the Father "holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight."
- A. True
 - B. False
50. Paul affirmed in one sense the atonement is finished: Christ suffered once for all "in the body of his flesh through death".
- A. True
 - B. False

NOTES

51. What is the New Testament meaning of mystery?
- A. something too wonderful to explain
 - B. something eternally concealed
 - C. something formerly concealed but now revealed
 - D. none of these
52. Which is true of Paul's concern for the Christians of Colosse and Laodicea?
- A. Paul is in "great conflict" for them.
 - B. They are in grave danger of being induced into an erroneous intellectualism.
 - C. Christianity is the true gnosis (spiritual knowledge), the final philosophy.
 - D. all of these
53. By our union with Christ we have put off "the whole personality organized for, and geared into rebellion against God."
- A. True
 - B. False
54. In baptism we confessed our death with Christ to sin and our resurrection with him to new life.
- A. True
 - B. False
55. Christ has blotted out our debt to the Mosaic law, nailing its ordinances to his cross and canceling its claims upon us.
- A. True
 - B. False
56. The whole body of the ceremonial law was but a passing shadow of the full reality we now enjoy in Christ.
- A. True
 - B. False
57. Which is true of Paul's admonition to avoid spiritual pride?
- A. We must not be beguiled into the false humility of ascetic self-denial.
 - B. We must not be led into angel worship.
 - C. We must avoid "the mind of the flesh."
 - D. all of these

NOTES

58. Which is true of Paul's teaching on the consequences of our death with Christ?
- A. It is applied in a practical way.
 - B. The old life, dominated by the endless list of "don'ts," has ceased.
 - C. It is not what a person eats that counts.
 - D. all of these
59. Which is true of Paul's teaching on the consequences of our resurrection with Christ?
- A. Christ is the center of our interest.
 - B. Our existence is bound up in Christ.
 - C. When Christ appears in his final glory, we shall share in his complete redemption.
 - D. all of these
60. Which is true of Paul's teaching on the Christian life that requires "putting off" some things?
- A. It is an impractical thing.
 - B. It is not something Christians can experience.
 - C. It involves saying "goodbye to the old life."
 - D. all of these
61. Which is true of Paul's teaching on the Christian life that requires "putting on" some things?
- A. It involves renewal.
 - B. It involves being re-created.
 - C. We must appropriate and express what is already ours in Christ.
 - D. all of these
62. The Bible recognizes that freedom requires discipline and the restraint of order.
- A. True
 - B. False
63. Paul urged the Colossians to be careful to maintain their Christian example before the unbelieving world.
- A. True
 - B. False

NOTES

64. Greetings were also sent to the Colossians from how many Christian men who were with Paul as he wrote the letter?
- A. 2
 - B. 4
 - C. 6
 - D. 8

CHAPTER 4. PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

65. Where was Onesimus' home?
- A. Jerusalem
 - B. Samaria
 - C. Colosse
 - D. Tarsus
66. It is clear that Paul was "a prisoner of Jesus Christ" when he wrote this letter to Philemon.
- A. True
 - B. False
67. The name "Onesimus" means "not useful" in Greek.
- A. True
 - B. False
68. Paul reminds us that "every good thing" which is in us is "in Christ Jesus."
- A. True
 - B. False
69. As Christ's ambassador Paul *could not* keep Onesimus.
- A. True
 - B. False
70. There can be no doubt that Onesimus had become a Christian under whose influence?
- A. Timothy
 - B. Peter
 - C. Paul
 - D. none of these

NOTES

71. There can be no doubt that Onesimus had become a Christian under whose influence?
- A. the church as a whole in “your home”
 - B. the Ephesians
 - C. the Colossians
 - D. the Galatians
72. Paul’s use of “grace” and “peace” mingles the Greek and Hebrew salutations.
- A. True
 - B. False
73. Philemon is a typical Pauline letter, except that it contains no practical section.
- A. True
 - B. False
74. Paul claimed that Onesimus was not useful to him.
- A. True
 - B. False
75. This brief letter concludes with a characteristic benediction.
- A. True
 - B. False

METHODS OF STUDY

Have you enjoyed this study of Paul's prison letters? Do you wish to study further? If so, here are a few more suggestions.

1. Compare the relationship of Paul's letter to the Ephesians to his letters to Philemon and the Colossians.
2. Compare the circumstances of Paul's writing to the Philippians to those of the Ephesians, Philemon, and the Colossians.
3. Consider the general spirit of unity in the Philippian church in contrast to the situation with Euodia and Syntyche.
4. Compare the errors in the Colossian church to errors in today's Church.
5. Consider some of the uniqueness of the Christian faith that Paul expressed in his letter to the Colossians.
6. Examine some ways that Paul's letter to Philemon could be considered a twin to his letter to the Colossians.

May Jesus, the Head of the Church, become even more of a power in your life as you study the Epistle to the Ephesians!

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

NOTES

Ephesians [uh-FEE-zhnz]
Philippians [fi-LIP-ee-uhnz]
Colossians [kuh-LAA-shnz]
Philemon [fuh-LEE-muhn]
Christological [krist-UH-loj-i-kuhl]
Onesimus [oh-NESS-ih-muss]
Colosse [kuh-LOS-eye]
Colossian [kuh-LAA-shn]
Tychicus [TI-kuh-kuhs]
Macedon [MA-suh-daan]
Alexander [AL-ex-an-der]
Macedonia [MAS-uh-DOH-nee-uh]
Aegean [uh-JEE-uhn]
Egnatian [ay-eeg-NAY-suhn]
Octavian [aak-TAY-vee-uhn]
Brutus [BROO-tuhs]
Cassius [KA-see-uhs]
Praetorian Guard [pree-TAW-ree-uhn gaard]
Epaphroditus [eh-PA-froh-dai-tuhs]
Judaism [JOO-dee-i-zm]
antinomianism [AN-ti-noh-mee-n-is-m]
Judaizers [JEW-duh-ie-zerz]
libation [lai-BAY-shn]
Judaistic [JOO-duh-is-tik]
Abrahamic [ay-bruh-HA-muhk]
Hellenistic [heh-luh-NI-stik]
Palestine [PAL-uh-styn]
Jerusalem [juh-REW-suh-lum]
Antinomians [AN-ti-noh-mee-nz]
Phrygia [FRI-jee-uh]
Lycus [LAI-kuhs]
Ephesus [EH-fuh-suhs]
Euphrates [yoo-FRAY-teez]
Laodicea [lay-ow-duh-SEE-uh]
Hierapolis [her-RA-poh-luhs]
Phrygians [FRI-jee-uh-nz]
Epaphras [ep-uh-FRAS]
Gnosticism [NAHS-tuh-SIZ-um]

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE



NOTES

Phrygian [FRI-jee-uhn]
Laodiceans [lay-aa-duh-SEE-uhnz]
Aristarchus [eh-ruh-STAAR-kuhs]
Thessalonica [teh-suh-LAA-nuh-kuh]
Thessalonians [teh-suh-LOW-nynz]
Caesarea [seh-suh-REE-uh]
Demas [dee-mahs]
Marcion [MAAR-see-uhn]
Ignatius [uhg-NAY-shuhs]
Archippus [ar-KI-puhs]
Apphia [AF-ee-uh]