

## Class Schedule

### Class: Ephesians, Philipians, Colossians, & Philemon

<u>Date</u>	<u>Week</u>	<u>Chapters</u>
Jul 3	1	Ephesians 1:1-14
Jul 10	2	Ephesians 1:15-2:10
Jul 17	3	No Class for Youth Summit
Jul 24	4	Ephesians 2:11-22
Jul 31	5	Ephesians 3:1-21
Aug 7	6	Ephesians 4:1-16
Aug 14	7	Ephesians 4:17-32
Aug 21	8	Ephesians 5:1-21
Aug 28	9	Ephesians 5:22-6:9
Sep 4	10	Ephesians 6:10-24
Sep 11	11	Philippians 1:1-18
Sep 18	12	Philippians 1:19-30
Sep 25	13	Philippians 2:1-11
Quarter Break		
Oct 2	14	Philippians 2:12-30
Oct 9	15	Philippians 3:1-11
Oct 16	16	Philippians 3:12-21
Oct 23	17	Philippians 4:1-9
Oct 30	18	Philippians 4:10-23
Nov 6	19	Colossians 1:1-18
Nov 13	20	Colossians 1:19-29
Nov 20	21	Colossians 2:1-10
Nov 27	22	Colossians 2:11-23
Dec 4	23	Colossians 3:1-11
Dec 11	24	Colossians 3:12-4:1
Dec 18	25	Colossians 4:2-18
Dec 25	26	Philemon Intro & 1-25

## THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

### ***Introduction***

Except for the book of Romans, the book of Ephesians is the most carefully written presentation of Christian theology in the New Testament. Paul wrote this epistle to make Christians more aware of the riches they have in Christ and to motivate them to draw upon these spiritual resources in daily living.

### ***Author***

The name Paul occurs at 1:1 and 3:1 as the author of this book, and the ancient tradition of the church supports this claim. Some have argued, however, that Ephesians differs in vocabulary and style, and that the view of the universal church as the body of Christ represents a later theological development. Arguments from vocabulary and style are notoriously subjective, however, and the richness of the theology in Ephesians is better attributed to Paul's own growth and meditation on the nature of the church.

### ***Date***

As one of Paul's "Prison Epistles" (the name given collectively to Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon), the letter would be dated to the period A.D. 60–63, corresponding to the time of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (cf. Acts 28:16–31). It was probably written at about the same time as Colossians.

The destination of the epistle is less certain. Because the phrase "in Ephesus" (1:1) was omitted in some early Greek manuscripts, some have suggested that the epistle was a circular letter addressed to the churches of Asia Minor as a whole and forwarded from church to church. Some scholars believe that this theory explains Paul's reference in Colossians 4:16, where he requested that the epistle to the Colossians be read along with the "epistle from Laodicea." This may refer to a copy of Ephesians with the name "Laodicea" inserted in a blank space so that the circular letter might also be read there.

### ***Themes and Literary Structure***

The first half of Ephesians lists the believer's heavenly possessions in Christ Jesus: adoption, redemption, inheritance, power, life, grace, citizenship, and the love of Christ. There are no imperatives in chapters 1–3, which focus on the divine gifts to the believer. But chapters 4–6 include thirty-five directives that speak of believers' responsibility to conduct themselves according to their calling. Thus, the two main divisions of the book are: the position of the Christian (chs. 1–3), and the practice of the Christian (chs. 4–6).

The wonderful news of salvation in Ephesians is directed toward the goal of "the praise of His glory" (1:6, 12, 14). The word "glory" occurs eight times and refers to the exceeding excellence of God's love, His wisdom, and His power. God's glory is particularly revealed in His

commitment to build a glorious, mature, and ministering church, “not having spot or wrinkle” (5:27).

The “heavenly” character of the believer’s calling is stressed in Ephesians (1:3). Although previously dead in sin, the Christian has been raised with Christ and seated with Him in the “heavenly places” (2:6). This “heavenly” calling, in turn, provides the means and empowerment of the believer’s life of obedience on earth (4:1, 7–10).

### ***The City of Ephesus***

At the end of his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus where he left Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18–21). Returning to the city on his third missionary journey, Paul spent nearly three years there (Acts 18:23–19:41). Paul’s effective ministry began seriously to hurt the traffic in magic and images, leading to an uproar in the huge Ephesian theater. Paul then left for Macedonia, but afterward he met with the Ephesian elders while on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:17–38).

### ***Our Blessings in Christ***

Paul’s important phrase “in Christ” (or its equivalent) appears about thirty-five times, more than in any other New Testament book. Furthermore, the salvation of the believer is ensured by the work of all three Persons of the Trinity—the loving choice of the Father (1:3–6), the redeeming work of the Son (1:7–12), and the sealing of the Holy Spirit (1:13, 14). 1

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson’s complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

## OUTLINE OF EPHESIANS

### PART ONE: WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US

- I. 1:1-14 Introduction**
- 1:1-2 Address & Salutation
  - 1:3-14 God's blessing's and plans in Christ
- II. 1:15-3:21 The Church in Christ**
- 1:15-23 Prayer for wisdom, & revelation
  - 2:1-22 Salvation in Christ
  - 3:1-21 Paul's revelation of the mystery

### PART TWO: WHAT GOD WANTS US TO DO

- I. 4:1-16 Walk in unity**
- 4:1-3 Exhortation to unity
  - 4:4-6 Seven unifying traits
  - 4:7-16 The unity of the body of Christ
- II. 4:17-6:9 Walk in holiness**
- 4:17-24 Put on the new man
  - 4:25-32 Be kind to one another
  - 5:1-7 Walk in love
  - 5:8-14 Walk in the light
  - 5:15-21 Walk in wisdom
- III. 6:10-24 Walk in battle**
- 6:10-20 Put on the armor of God
  - 6:21-24 Final greetings

## ***Lesson 1 – July 3<sup>rd</sup>: Ephesians 1:1-14***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. How was Paul made an apostle? (1:1)
2. How has God blessed believers? (1:3)
3. When did God choose us in Him? (1:4)
4. What is the purpose of God choosing us? (1:4)
5. What did God determine beforehand for us? (1:5)
6. What is the goal of God's predestination? (1:6)
7. What is redemption? How are we redeemed(1:7)
8. What has God done for the those in Him? (1:7-11)
9. What was the plan for those who first believed? (1:12)
10. What happens to those who hear the words of truth and believe? (1:13)
11. What is the Holy Spirit to us in Christ? (1:14)

### **GET IT**

12. What did God predestine before He created anything?

### **APPLY IT**

13. How can you say thank you to God for the blessings he has given you?

## ***Lesson 2 – July 10<sup>th</sup>: Ephesians 1:15-2:10***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. Why did Paul continually thank God for the Ephesians? (1:15-16)
2. What did Paul ask God to give to the Ephesian Christians? (1:17)
3. Why did Paul ask that the Ephesians' hearts would continue to be enlightened? (1:18-19)
4. When did God work His mighty power? (1:20-21)
5. What is the church's relationship to Christ? (1:22-23)
6. Before they believed, what was the spiritual condition of the Ephesians? (2:1)
7. How had all Paul and the rest who believed once walked? (2:2-3)
8. Why did God make those who were dead alive with Christ? (2:4-5)
9. What position has God given Christians in Christ? (2:6)
10. What will God show in the ages to come? (2:7)
11. Why can no one boast in his own salvation? (2:8-9)
12. What is the purpose of God's workmanship? (2:10)

### **GET IT**

13. How is your salvation not from yourself?

### **APPLY IT**

14. What people in need could you remember in your prayers this week?

### ***Lesson 3 – July 24<sup>th</sup>: Ephesians 2:11-22***

#### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What did Paul command the Gentiles to remember? (2:11-12)
2. What did the blood of Christ do for the condition of the Gentiles? (2:13)
3. Who brought peace to Jewish and Gentile believers? (2:14)
4. How did the enmity between Jews and Gentiles come to an end? (2:14-16)
5. What is the result of believing the message preached by Christ? (2:17-18)
6. What is the result of this work Christ has done? (2:19)
7. What is the foundation these new members of God's household are built? (2:20)
8. What is this household of God's growing into? (2:21)
9. For what purpose were the Ephesians being built together? (2:22)

#### **GET IT**

10. How did Jesus create Peace between Jews and Gentiles and then with God?

#### **APPLY IT**

11. How can you show the hope and love of God to an "outsider"?

## ***Lesson 4 – July 31<sup>st</sup>: Ephesians 3:1-21***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What was Paul made a steward of? (3:2-3)
2. How can we understand the mystery of Christ? (3:3-4)
3. When was the mystery of Christ disclosed? (3:5)
4. What mystery does Paul reveal here? (3:6)
5. By whose power is Paul working? (3:7)
6. For what purpose was Paul given this grace? (3:8-9)
7. What was the intent of having Paul make known the mystery? (3:10-12)
8. Why were Paul's sufferings the glory of the Ephesians? (3:13)
9. What did Paul request of the Father? (3:16)
10. How would Christ dwell in the believers' hearts? (3:17)
11. How much is God able to do? According to what power? (3:20)

### **GET IT**

12. Why did Paul want the Ephesians to be rooted and established in love?

### **APPLY IT**

13. What are you supposed to do with this knowledge of the mystery of Christ?

## ***Lesson 5 – August 7<sup>th</sup>: Ephesians 4:1-16***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What did Paul urge the Ephesians to do? (4:1)
2. What attitudes promote unity among Christians? (4:2)
3. What are the seven elements that unite Christians? What should we do with them? (4:3-6)
4. How has each of us (all Christians) been given grace? (4:7)
5. What commentary did Paul make on the Old Testament passage he quoted? Why? (4:8-10)
6. With what kind of gifts does Christ give the church? (4:11)
7. Were these gifts all measured out equally? (4:11)
8. What is the purpose of these gifts? (4:12-13)
9. What results does God want for the church from these gifts? (4:14-16)

### **GET IT**

10. Why did Paul stress the theme of Christian unity to the Ephesians?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What service can you supply to another member this week?

## ***Lesson 6 – August 14<sup>th</sup>: Ephesians 4:17-32***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. In what way were Ephesian believers instructed not to live as Gentiles? (4:17-19)
2. How did Paul contrast the Ephesian Christians with the Gentiles? (4:20-21)
3. In what way does God want Christians to change? (4:22-24)
4. What should Christians stop doing? (4:22)
5. How can we accomplish this? (4:23)
6. What should Christians begin doing? (4:24)
7. How can we put into practice this process concerning lying, anger, and stealing? (4:25-28)
8. How should believers speak to others? (4:29)
9. How can we hurt the Holy Spirit? (4:29-30)
10. What attitudes and speech should believers rid themselves of? (4:31)
11. Instead of evil attitudes and speech towards each other what did we do? (4:32)

### **GET IT**

12. How do we know if we are progressing in putting off the old man and putting on Christ?

### **APPLY IT**

13. What would be the first step for you in changing an old pattern of behavior?

## ***Lesson 7 – August 21<sup>st</sup>: Ephesians 5:1-21***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What relationship do followers of God have with Him? (5:1)
2. How are Christians to imitate Christ? (5:2)
3. What practices should Christians have no part in? (5:3-6)
4. Whom do we need to avoid? When? Why? (5:5-7)
5. Why should Christians not become partners with non-Christians? (5:7-8)
6. To walk as children of light what must we do? (5:8-10)
7. Instead of joining with the sons of disobedience what should we do? (5:11-13)
8. To walk in wisdom what must you do? (5:15-17)
9. What four things should result from being filled with the Spirit? (5:18-21)
10. How should believers relate to one another? (5:21)

### **GET IT**

11. How can we prove what is acceptable to the Lord?

### **APPLY IT**

12. What opportunities might come up this week that you can take advantage of to do the will of the Lord?

## ***Lesson 8 – August 28<sup>th</sup>: Ephesians 5:22-6:9***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What should wives render to their Husbands as they should to the Lord? (5:22)
2. How is the relationship of the church to Christ an example to wives? (5:23-24)
3. How are husbands commanded to love their wives? (5:25-28)
4. How should husbands love their wives? (5:28-30)
5. What are the responsibilities of the husband and wife toward each other? (5:33)
6. Why is a child's obedience to his or her parents pleasing to the Lord? (6:1)
7. What does it mean to "honor your father and mother"? (6:2-3)
8. Why does God only tell fathers not to provoke children to wrath? (6:4)
9. What does God want fathers to do? (6:4)
10. What responsibilities did slaves have to their masters? (6:5-8)
11. What reward for proper service could the slave expect? (6:7-8)
12. What directives did Paul give slave owners? (6:9)

### **GET IT**

13. How do the instructions to husbands, fathers & masters fit in the context of submitting to one another?

### **APPLY IT**

14. How can you remember to serve people as if you were serving the Lord?

## ***Lesson 9 – September 4<sup>th</sup>: Ephesians 6:10-24***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. Finally, what did Paul exhort his audience to do? (6:10-11)
2. Why do Christians need to put on God's armor? (6:11-12)
3. What can Christians dressed in the full armor of God expect? (6:13)
4. How should Christians be armed for battle? (6:14-17)
5. What one thing ties all the armor of God together? (6:14-17)
6. What last two things did Paul tell all Christians to do? (6:18)
7. Why did Paul ask the Ephesians to pray for him? (6:19-20)
8. How would Tychicus help the Ephesians? (6:21-22)
9. What final pleas does Paul make for the Ephesians? (6:23-24)

### **GET IT**

10. What do all the parts of the armor of God have in common?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What one thing can you do this week to put on your armor?

## THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

### **Introduction**

Philippians is the epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstances. Paul freely expresses his fond affection for the Philippian Christians, appreciates their consistent testimony and support, and lovingly urges them to center their actions and thoughts on the pursuit of the Person and power of Christ.

### **Author**

This letter is clearly identified as written by Paul (1:1), and Pauline authorship has never seriously been questioned.

### **Date**

The traditional view has been that Paul wrote Philippians between A.D. 61 and 63 from imprisonment in Rome. The references to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) fit with Paul's Roman imprisonment. In addition, Paul's statements in 1:12–20 and 4:22 strongly suggest that the imprisonment was fairly long. Thus, this letter appears to have been written sometime after the beginning of Paul's imprisonment recorded in Acts 28.

### **Themes and Literary Structure**

Philippians is one of Paul's most personal letters. In it he shares his own experience with Christ, and his struggle over whether to prefer dying to be with Christ or living to serve the Philippians (1:21–26). The Philippians were in his heart and they supported him in his imprisonment (1:7), a fact which explains the note of gratitude that Paul frequently sounds (1:3–11; 2:19–30; 4:10–20).

Philippians focuses on: Paul's account of his present circumstances (ch. 1), Paul's appeal to have the mind of Christ (ch. 2), his appeal to have the knowledge of Christ (ch. 3), and his appeal to have the peace of Christ (ch. 4).

Prominent in Philippians is the theme of joy. The word "joy" (Greek: *chara*) is found five times (1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1) and the verb "to rejoice" occurs eleven times (twice in 1:18; 2:17, 18; 4:4; and once in 2:28; 3:1; and 4:10). Despite his unpleasant circumstances in prison, Paul manifests a joyous confidence in God's provision for him personally and for the Philippian Christians.

Paul exhorts the Philippians to have a spirit of unity and mutual concern by embracing the attitude of humility (2:1–4), the greatest example of which is the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ (2:5–11). The *kenosis*, or "self-emptying" of Christ does not mean that He relinquished His essential deity, but that He withheld His preincarnate glory and voluntarily restricted His use of certain attributes (such as omnipresence).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

# Outline of Philippians

- I. 1:1-11**                    **Introduction**  
1:1-2                    Greeting  
1:3-7                    Thanksgiving & Confidence  
1:8-11                   Paul's prayer for them
- II. 1:12-26**                **Paul's Circumstances**  
1:12-14                The result of his imprisonment  
1:15-18                The differing motives for preaching Christ  
1:19-26                The alternatives of life or death
- III. 1:27-2:18**            **Exhortation on Christian living and fellowship**  
1:27-30                Appeal to live worthy of the gospel  
2:1-4                    Appeal to unity through humility  
2:5-11                   The example Christ  
2:12-18                The practical outworking of salvation
- IV. 2:19-30**              **Future plans**  
2:19-24                Commendation of Timothy  
2:25-30                Explanations concerning Epaphroditus
- V. 3:1-21**                 **Spiritual Ambitions**  
3:1-3                    Beware of confidence in the flesh  
3:4-7                    Paul's "life in the flesh"  
3:8-14                  Paul rejects old ambitions and strives towards new  
3:15-17                Exhortation to like-mindedness  
3:18-21                Warning of worldly and call to heavenly
- VI. 4:1-23**                **Exhortations, thanks and greetings**  
4:1-3                    Personal appeals  
4:4-7                    A call to joy and prayerfulness  
4:8-9                    Meditate on good things  
4:10-20                The Philippians gifts to Paul  
4:21-23                Final greetings

## ***Lesson 10 – September 11<sup>th</sup>: Philippians 1:1-18***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. How did Paul identify himself and his coworker? (1:1)
2. How did Paul greet the Philippians? (1:2)
3. When Paul thought about the Philippians, what did he do? (1:3)
4. How were the Philippians in partnership with Paul? (1:4-5)
5. What was Paul confident about? (1:6)
6. How did Paul feel about the Philippian church? (1:7-8)
7. What did Paul report that he prayed for? (1:9)
8. What two results did Paul seek? (1:10-11)
9. How was the gospel affected by Paul's bondage? (1:12-14)
10. Why did some people preach Christ out of envy and rivalry? (1:15-16)
11. Why did some people preach Christ in love? (1:15,17)
12. What made Paul rejoice? (1:18)

### **GET IT**

13. How could someone preach Christ from envy and strife as Paul mentions?

### **APPLY IT**

14. Which brother or sister would be heartened to receive a letter from you this week?

## ***Lesson 11 – September 18<sup>th</sup>: Philippians 1:19-30***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. How did Paul expect to be delivered? (1:19-20)
2. What was Paul's main purpose in living? (1:21)
3. Why was Paul torn between living and dying? (1:22-24)
4. Why did Paul think he would remain alive? (1:24-26)
5. What did Paul want the believers to do? (1:27-30)
6. How did Paul tell the Philippians to face opposition? (1:27-30)
7. How did Paul encourage the Christians at Philippi in their suffering? (1:29)
8. How was Paul an example for the Philippian Christians? (1:30)

### **GET IT**

9. Why did Paul expect to be delivered from his predicament?
10. Why did Paul have a desire to die?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What's the toughest thing you've had to experience as a Christian?
12. What can you do to encourage someone who is suffering because of his or her faith?

## ***Lesson 12 – September 25<sup>th</sup>: Philippians 2:1-11***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What four qualities mark unity with Christ? (2:1)
2. What did Paul say about selfishness? (2:3-4)
3. What did Paul exhort believers to have? (2:5)
4. How did Jesus limit Himself? (2:6-8)
5. What example of humility and unselfishness did Christ set for? (2:6-8)
6. How did God exalt Jesus? (2:9)
7. What confession will every person make? (2:11)

### **GET IT**

8. How can Christians show their unity in Christ in practical ways?
9. How was Christ fully God and fully man at the same time?
10. Why did Christ take on the form of man even though He was of the same nature as God?

### **APPLY IT**

11. How can you be a model of humility and service to other Christians this week?

## ***Lesson 13 – October 2<sup>nd</sup>: Philippians 2:12-30***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What were the Philippian believers to work out? (2:12-13)
2. Why were the Philippians shining "as lights" in the world? (2:14-16)
3. Why did Paul plan to send Timothy to the Philippians? (2:19)
4. In Paul's view, why did Timothy stand out? (2:21-22)
5. When would Paul send Timothy to the Philippians? (2:23)
6. Why did the Philippians send Epaphroditus to Paul? (2:25)
7. How did Epaphroditus feel about his friends in Philippi? (2:26)
8. How did God spare Paul tremendous sorrow? (2:27)
9. How did Paul demonstrate his selflessness? (2:28)
10. How were the Philippians told to welcome home Epaphroditus? (2:29-30)

### **GET IT**

11. What does it mean "to work out your salvation with fear and trembling"?

### **APPLY IT**

12. What do Christians tend to complain and argue about?

## ***Lesson 14 – October 9<sup>th</sup>: Philippians 3:1-11***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What did Paul call on believers to do? (3:1)
2. What did Paul say about certain false teachers? (3:2)
3. Whom did Paul identify as "the circumcision"? (3:3)
4. What autobiographical facts did Paul give? (3:4-6)
5. In what sense was Paul not boasting, even though he was calling attention to his accomplishments? (3:7-9)
6. Why did Paul view his former accomplishments as "rubbish"? (3:8)
7. What was Paul's "accomplishments" in Christ? (3:9-10)
8. What hope did Paul express? (3:11)

### **GET IT**

9. Who are the mutilation that Paul refers to? Why does he call them this?
10. Why do we tend to base our worth as Christians on our performance?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What do you need to start counting as rubbish for the sake of Christ?

## ***Lesson 15 – October 16<sup>th</sup>: Philippians 3:12-21***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. In what ways did Paul's spiritual life resemble the discipline of a runner? (3:12-14)
2. What was Paul's view of the past? (3:13)
3. What was Paul's goal? (3:14)
4. How did Paul call the Philippians to share his view? (3:15)
5. What did Paul hope for the believers who disagreed with him? (3:15)
6. What was Paul's plea to the Philippians? (3:16)
7. How did Paul want believers to imitate him? (3:17)
8. How did Paul describe God's enemies? (3:18-19)
9. Where did the Philippian Christians have their citizenship? (3:20)
10. Whom did the Philippian believers eagerly await? (3:20)
11. What characterizes citizens of heaven? (3:21)

### **GET IT**

12. What does Paul mean by the degree we have attained?

### **APPLY IT**

13. What past problems or success should you lay aside so you can move on?

## ***Lesson 16 – October 23<sup>rd</sup>: Philippians 4:1-9***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. How did Paul feel about the Philippians? (4:1)
2. Why did Paul plead with Euodia and Syntyche? (4:2)
3. How had Euodia and Syntyche helped Paul in the past? (4:3)
4. What did Paul encourage his readers to do? (4:4)
5. How did Paul tell the Philippian Christians to treat others? (4:5)
6. What were the Philippians to do instead of worrying? (4:6-7)
7. What things should we focus our thoughts on? (4:8)
8. What were the Philippians to put into practice? (4:9)

### **GET IT**

9. How can a believer enjoy the peace of God?
10. What does it mean that the peace of God surpasses understanding?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What can you do today to reduce your level of anxiety?

## ***Lesson 17 – October 30<sup>th</sup>: Philippians 4:10-23***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What lesson had Paul learned about contentment? (4:10-13)
2. Why could Paul handle any kind of circumstance? (4:13)
3. What did the Philippians do about Paul's troubles? (4:14)
4. How had the Philippians supported Paul in the past? (4:15-16)
5. What did Paul want for the Philippians? (4:17)
6. How would God reciprocate the believers' generosity? (4:19)
7. To whom did Paul give thanks and praise? (4:20)
8. Who sent final greetings to the Philippians? (4:21-22)
9. To what did Paul give prominence in closing his letter? (4:23)

### **GET IT**

10. How could Paul be so flexible in his approach to life's circumstances?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What can you learn from Paul about being content?

## THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

### **Introduction**

Colossians is perhaps the most Christ-centered book in the Bible. In it Paul stresses the preeminence of the Person of Christ and the completeness of the salvation He provides.

### **Author**

The external testimony to the Pauline authorship of Colossians is ancient and consistent. The internal evidence is also very good; it not only claims to have been written by Paul (1:1, 23; 4:18), but the personal details and close parallels with Ephesians and Philemon strengthen the case.

Nevertheless, the authenticity of this letter has been challenged on the ground of vocabulary and thought. In its four chapters, Colossians uses fifty-five Greek words that do not appear in Paul's other epistles. The high Christology of Colossians has been compared to John's later concept of Christ as the Creator *Logos* (1:15–23; cf. John 1:1–18), with the conclusion that these concepts were too late for Paul's time. Also, it is sometimes argued that the Colossian heresy is a type of Gnosticism prevalent in the second-century A.D.

We must recognize, however, that Paul commanded a wide vocabulary, and the unique topics addressed in this letter, particularly the Colossian heresy, account for the vocabulary of the epistle. In addition, there is no reason to assume that Paul was unaware of Christ's work as Creator, especially in view of Philippians 2:5–11. Finally, the information regarding the Colossian heresy in chapter 2 points rather to what was probably an early form of Gnosticism, rather than full-fledged Gnosticism of the second century variety.

### **Date**

Paul wrote this epistle from prison, as he did Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. Although Caesarea and Ephesus have been suggested as possible locations of authorship, the bulk of evidence suggests that Paul wrote it in A.D. 60 or 61 during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16–31) and sent it with Tychicus and the converted slave Onesimus to Colosse (4:7–9; cf. Eph 6:21; Philem. 10–12).

Colosse was a minor city about one hundred miles east of Ephesus in the region of the seven Asian churches of Revelation 1–3. Located in the fertile Lycus Valley on the road from Ephesus to the east, Colosse had previously been a populous center of commerce, but by the time of Paul it had been eclipsed in importance by the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Apart from this letter, Colosse exerted almost no influence on early church history.

The precise character of the Colossian heresy has been a matter of debate. The nature of this heresy can only be deduced from Paul's incidental references to it in his refutation in 2:8–23. It was apparently a religious system that combined elements from Hellenistic Greek speculation (2:4, 8–10), Jewish legalism (2:11–17), and Oriental mysticism (2:18–23). It involved a low view of the body (2:20–23) and probably of nature as a whole. With its stress upon the importance of circumcision, dietary regulations, and ritual observances, together with its worship of angels and preoccupation with mystical experiences, the Colossian heresy denied the sufficiency of Christ, and any attempt to fit Christ into such a system would undermine His Person and redemptive work.

### **Themes and Literary Structure**

The resounding theme in Colossians is the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ in all things. The believer is complete in Him alone and lacks nothing because "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9). The first part of the epistle is an exposition of Christ's supremacy (chs. 1–2); the second part explains the implications of Christ's supremacy in terms of the believer's submission to Christ the Lord (chs. 3–4).

Particularly in the second half of the epistle, Paul explores the implications of the believer's union with Christ. The believer's union with Christ in His death, resurrection and exaltation is the foundation upon which earthly life must be built (3:1–4). Because of their death with Christ, Christians must regard themselves as dead to the old way of sin (3:5–11); because of their resurrection with Christ, believers must regard themselves as alive to Him in righteousness and must put on the new qualities that are prompted by Christian love (3:12–17).

The new life in Christ is to be manifested in the personal relationships of the Christian. Paul provides specific instructions for husbands and wives, children, servants, and masters (3:18–4:1).

## OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS

### Part One: The Supremacy of Christ in the Church (1:1–2:23)

- I. **Introduction 1:1–14**
  - A. Paul's Greeting to the Colossians 1:1, 2
  - B. Paul's Thanksgiving for the Colossians 1:3–8
  - C. Paul's Prayer for the Colossians 1:9–14
- II. **The Preeminence of Christ 1:15–2:3**
  - A. Christ Is Preeminent in Creation 1:15–18
  - B. Christ Is Preeminent in Redemption 1:19–23
  - C. Christ Is Preeminent in the Church 1:24–2:3
- III. **The Freedom in Christ 2:4–23**
  - A. Freedom from Enticing Words 2:4–7
  - B. Freedom from Vain Philosophy 2:8–10
  - C. Freedom from the Judgment of Men 2:11–17
  - D. Freedom from Improper Worship 2:18, 19
  - E. Freedom from the Doctrine of Men 2:20–23

### Part Two: The Submission to Christ in the Church (3:1–4:18)

- I. **The Position of the Believer 3:1–4**
- II. **The Practice of the Believer 3:5–4:6**
  - A. Put Off the Old Man 3:5–11
  - B. Put On the New Man 3:12–17
  - C. Personal Commands for Holiness 3:18–4:6
- III. **Conclusion 4:7–18**
  - A. Commendation of Tychicus 4:7–9
  - B. Greetings from Paul's Friends 4:10–14
  - C. Introductions Regarding This Letter 4:15–18 <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

## ***Lesson 18 – November 6<sup>th</sup>: Colossians 1:1-18***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. Who was with Paul when he wrote this letter? (1:1)
2. Why did Paul offer prayers of thanksgiving for the Colossians? (1:3-4)
3. From what source did the believers' faith and love spring? (1:5)
4. What did Epaphras tell Paul and Timothy about the Colossians? (1:7-8)
5. What was Paul's primary prayer for these Christians? (1:9)
6. What results did Paul want for the Colossians? (1:10)
7. How does God enable believers to share in His inheritance? (1:12-14)
8. What is Christ's relationship to Creation? (1:15-17)
9. What is Christ's relationship to the church? (1:18)

### **GET IT**

10. Why did Paul take the time to describe the qualities of Christ?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What would aid you from being moved away from your hope of the gospel?

## ***Lesson 19 – November 13<sup>th</sup>: Colossians 1:19-29***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What did God achieve through the work of His Son? (1:20)
2. Why was reconciliation necessary? (1:21-22)
3. What is the role of faith in reconciliation with God? (1:23)
4. Why did Paul rejoice? (1:24)
5. What stewardship did God give Paul? (1:25)
6. To what mystery did Paul refer? (1:26)
7. To whom had God chosen to make known a mystery? (1:27)
8. How did Paul help believers become spiritually mature? (1:28-29)

### **GET IT**

9. What difference does our understanding about Christ make?
10. How were Paul's sufferings helping the Colossians?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What would cause you to move away from your hope in the gospel of Christ?

## ***Lesson 20 – November 20<sup>th</sup>: Colossians 2:1-10***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What did Paul want his audience to know? (2:1)
2. What is hidden in Christ? (2:3)
3. How would a commitment to the full knowledge of Christ protect the Colossians? (2:4)
4. What delighted Paul? (2:5)
5. How did Paul tell the Colossians to continue in Christ? (2:6-7)
6. What false teaching was Paul concerned about? (2:8)
7. What did Paul affirm about Christ? How? (2:9-10)

### **GET IT**

8. What results did Paul expect from his work for the sake of the gospel?
9. How is suffering an essential part of the Christian life?

### **APPLY IT**

10. What can we do to grow in our understanding of Christ?

## ***Lesson 21 – November 27<sup>th</sup>: Colossians 2:11-23***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. Why do Gentile Christians have no need to conform to Jewish laws? (2:11-12)
2. How did the Cross cancel the written code? (2:13-14)
3. From what did Christ deliver us? How? (2:15-17)
4. How did Paul encourage the Colossians to practice their freedom in Christ? (2:16)
5. How did Christ fulfill what the Old Testament foreshadowed? (2:17)
6. What were the characteristics of the false teachers? (2:18-19)
7. How did Paul challenge the legalism that had infected the church? (2:20-21)
8. What are the failings of human commands and teachings? (2:20-23)

### **GET IT**

9. How are we circumcised by Christ?

### **APPLY IT**

10. How can you best exercise the freedom you have in Christ?

## ***Lesson 22 – December 4<sup>th</sup>: Colossians 3:1-11***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What did Paul tell the Colossians to seek? (3:1)
2. Where did Paul tell the believers to focus their thinking? (3:2)
3. What was the Colossians' security? (3:3)
4. Why should believers look forward to Christ's return? (3:4)
5. What evil activities does God seek to eliminate from our lives? (3:5)
6. Why is God's wrath coming? (3:5-6)
7. What did the Colossians need to put off? (3:7-9)
8. What did the Colossians need to put on? (3:10)
9. What distinctions are removed in Christ? (3:11)

### **GET IT**

10. How do we go through the process of putting off the old man and putting on Christ?

### **APPLY IT**

11. What Christian quality would you like most to add right now?

## ***Lesson 23 – December 11<sup>th</sup>: Colossians 3:12-4:1***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. How were the Colossian believers called to clothe themselves? (3:12-14)
2. Why did Paul call on the believers to be peaceful and thankful? (3:15-16)
3. What should we do? How? (3:17)
4. What is one principle that ought to guide everything we do? (3:17)
5. What should wives do? (3:18)
6. What should husbands do? (3:19)
7. How should children respond to parents? (3:20)
8. Of what do fathers need to be careful? (3:21)
9. What directives did Paul give servants? (3:22-25)
10. What instructions did Paul give masters? (4:1)

### **GET IT**

11. What does it mean to do or say everything in the name of the Lord?

### **APPLY IT**

12. What is one way you can improve the way you treat each member of your family?

## ***Lesson 24 – December 18<sup>th</sup>: Colossians 4:2-18***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What did Paul prescribe for all believers? (4:2)
2. What request did Paul make of his readers? (4:3-4)
3. What did Paul say about the Christian's interaction with non-Christians? (4:5-6)
4. How should believers speak to others? (4:6)
5. Who was Tychicus? (4:7)
6. Why did Paul send Tychicus and Onesimus to Colosse? (4:7-8)
7. What did Epaphras do on behalf of the church at Colosse? (4:12-13)
8. What relationship did Luke and Demas have to Paul? (4:14)
9. To whom did Paul send greetings? (4:15)
10. Where did Paul want his letter read? (4:16)
11. What instruction did Paul send Archippus? (4:17)
12. How did Paul conclude his letter? (4:18)

### **GET IT**

13. How should we interact with non-Christians to walk wisely?

### **APPLY IT**

14. How much time do you devote to prayer each day?

## THE BOOK OF PHILEMON

### **Introduction**

This briefest of Paul's epistles (only 334 words in the Greek text) is a model of courtesy, discretion, and loving concern for the forgiveness of one who would otherwise face severe consequences.

### **Author**

The general consensus of scholarship recognizes Philemon as the work of Paul. There could have been no doctrinal motive for its forgery, and it is supported externally by consistent tradition and internally by not less than three references to Paul (vv. 1, 9, 19).

### **Date**

Philemon is one of the four "Prison Epistles" (Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were the others). It was written in A.D. 60 or 61 and dispatched at the same time as Colossians during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Philemon 22 reflects Paul's hope of release from captivity.

Reconstructing the background of this letter, it appears that a slave named Onesimus had wronged his master and escaped to Rome, where he found relative safety among the masses. Somehow, Onesimus came into contact with Paul, who led him to Christ. Knowing that Onesimus had a responsibility to return to Philemon, Paul sent him back with Tychicus to Colosse carrying the epistle to Philemon.

Philemon was a resident of Colosse and a convert of Paul (v. 19), perhaps through an encounter with Paul in Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey. Philemon's house was large enough to serve as a meeting place for the church there (v. 2). He was benevolent to other believers (vv. 5–7), and his son Archippus evidently held a position of leadership in the church (Col. 4:17; Philem. 2). Philemon may have had other slaves besides Onesimus, and he was not alone as a slave owner among the Colossian believers (Col. 4:1). Thus, this letter provided guidelines for other master-slave relationships.

### **Themes and Literary Structure**

This tactful and highly personal letter can be divided into three parts: prayer of thanksgiving for Philemon (vv. 1–7); petition of Paul for Onesimus (vv. 8–16); and the promise of Paul to Philemon (vv. 17–25).

Paul's epistle to Philemon is a testimony to the power of the grace of God in Christ Jesus and to the Christian love which unites believers. While he was formerly a thief and runaway slave, Philemon's slave Onesimus had been transformed by God's grace and was now a "beloved brother" of Philemon (v. 16).<sup>4</sup>

## OUTLINE OF PHILEMON

I.	<b>The Prayer of Thanksgiving for Philemon</b>	<b>1–7</b>
II.	<b>The Petition of Paul for Onesimus</b>	<b>8–16</b>
III.	<b>The Promise of Paul to Philemon</b>	<b>17–25</b>

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

Although slavery existed in most societies from as far back as records have been found, there have been only five genuine slave-societies, two of them in antiquity: classical Greece and Rome. The Greeks and Romans, apparently independently, transformed slavery into something new and wholly original in world history, “namely, an institutionalized system of large-scale employment of slave labour in both the countryside and the cities” (Finley, *Ideology*, p. 67). This ancient system of slavery was fully developed and stabilized as an institution by the 2nd cent B.C. The uniformity of legal rightlessness of all persons in slavery “masks the wide range of different social and economic roles slaves played, and the fact that most functions performed by slaves could also be undertaken by persons of free status” (Wiedemann, p. 2).

5

Prior to the 1st cent A.D., the chief means by which persons were enslaved were capture in war and kidnapping by pirates. Stealing persons and selling them into slavery had been practiced in the ancient Near East for many centuries. In 1 Tim. 1:10 the term *andrapodistēs*, “kidnapper” (RSV, NEB), “menstealer” (AV), “slave trader” (NIV), appears in a traditional list of vices, indicating that knowledge of this practice could be assumed in the late 1st cent A.D., even though the establishment of law and order within the empire had eliminated piracy and greatly reduced kidnapping by the middle of the 1st cent B.C.

With the cessation of the great wars of conquest after the death of Augustus, the primary source for slaves became breeding. To be sure, the First Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66–70) opened up a new source of slaves for the empire; e.g., Vespasian sent 6000 Jewish prisoners to Nero as a labor force for the (unsuccessful) cutting of a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth. But the slaves who are mentioned and addressed in the NT were most likely born into slavery, according to both Roman and Greek law, as children of mothers in slavery. Such breeding was an adequate source to maintain the large slave population of the previous century.

Other sources of slaves are important to note in the light of early Christian practices. Large numbers of people sold themselves into slavery for various reasons, above all to enter a life that was easier and more secure than existence as a poor, freeborn person, to obtain special jobs, and to climb socially. It is quite likely that the Erastus mentioned in Rom. 16:23 as the “city treasurer” (*oikonómos tēs póleōs*) of Corinth had to sell himself to the city (as a form of “bonding insurance”) in order to secure this responsible position. Such special slaves were usually held in municipal slavery until about age forty, at which time as freedmen and Roman citizens they often pursued political careers. Inscriptional evidence suggests that this Erastus

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cent century, centuries

<sup>5</sup>Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988.

cent century, centuries

RSV Revised Standard Version

NEB New English Bible

AV Authorized (King James) Version

NIV New International Version

NT New (Neues, Nouveau) Testament

did just that by being elected an *aedile* of Corinth, who then gave to the city the paving of the street in front of the main theater.

Many non-Romans sold themselves to Roman citizens with the justified expectation, carefully regulated by Roman law, of becoming Roman citizens themselves when manumitted. The money that one received from such a self-sale usually became the beginning of the personal funds (*peculium*) that would later be used to enter freedom under more favorable circumstances, e.g., with former debts extinguished. Greek law also recognized the validity of self-sale into slavery, often with a contract limiting the duration of the enslavement. Such sales were frequent in the eastern provinces in imperial times. Temporary self-sale had been known in Jewish circles for centuries.

6

Gaius, the Roman jurist, whose *Institutes* summarize the legal tradition valid in the 1st cent, observes that the basic legal distinction between persons is that of free or slave status (1.9). According to the law, a slave was a *res*, a thing, a chattel to be owned, bought, and sold. As such, a person in slavery could not contract a legal marriage, represent himself in court, or inherit; slaves were not regarded as having any kin and were often subject to more severe punishments than their owners for criminal acts. It was, of course, recognized that those in slavery, as many as one-third of the population in the large cities such as Rome, Ephesus, Antioch, and Corinth, were human beings if not “legal persons.” As such they were protected by law against severe cruelty from their owners or others.

Under Roman, Greek, and Jewish laws, those in slavery could own property, including other slaves! Some well-educated slaves bought children, raised and educated them, and recovered the tuition costs when selling them to families needing tutors. A slave’s property was entirely under the control of the slave, who could seek to increase it for use in purchasing legal freedom and in establishing a comfortable life as a freed person. The flamboyant, “nouveaux riches” activities of many former slaves called forth the scorn of the “old money” and staid Roman families.

7

Yet the uniformity with which slaves were not regarded as “legal persons” tends to hide the fact that slaves had many different roles and that people of free status would perform most of their functions. The principal exceptions were working in some mines reserved for convicted criminals and rowing in the chain gangs on galley ships; it was expected that these slaves of the empire would die working.

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<sup>6</sup>Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988.

cent century, centuries

<sup>7</sup>Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988.

8

To speak of “slaves” in the NT period is to refer to a logical class and a juridical class, but not to a social class as such. Any outcry for the “slaves of the world to unite” would have fallen on deaf ears, because the social sense of those in slavery was far more dependent on the social status of their owners than on their legal status as slaves. In outward appearance it was usually impossible to distinguish among slaves, freedmen and free persons. Neither the slave’s clothing nor his or her race revealed a legal or social status. Patterns of religious life, friends, or work did not separate slaves from freed persons or freeborn workers. It seems quite likely that when working as a “tentmaker,” Paul would have had persons in slavery as his shop-companions.

By no means was the slave’s position always “subordinate,” for in Greco-Roman households slaves served not only as cooks, cleaners, and personal attendants, but also as tutors of persons of all ages, physicians, nurses, close companions, and managers of the household. In the business world, slaves were not only janitors and delivery boys; they were managers of estates, shops, and ships, as well as salesmen and contracting agents. In the civil service slaves were not only used in street-paving and sewer-cleaning gangs, but also as administrators of funds and personnel and as executives with decision-making powers.

Thus, even though in Roman law, more than in Greek or Jewish law, the distinction between slave and free was quite sharp, in daily life a continuum of statuses existed in terms of social intercourse, culture, and wealth. Under Greek law special conditions blurred these distinctions even more. For example, many of the slaves who worked in handcraft factories lived apart from their owners, enjoying their own property and family life. Such a slave was usually employed by a person other than his or her owner and was paid a daily wage, about two-thirds of which went directly to the owner, who remained responsible for the physical well-being of the slave.

Certainly, capable slaves had an advantage over their free counterparts in that they were often given an excellent education at their owners’ expense. Famous philosophers (Epictetus), teachers (Verrius Flaccus), grammarians (Palaemon), administrators (M. A. Felix, the procurator who was Paul’s judge in Acts 23:24–24:27), artists, physicians, and writers were the result of this practice. These slaves and former slaves formed the broad “class” of intellectuals in the 1st century. Such slaves did not have to wait until manumission before they were capable of establishing friendships with their owners and other free persons as human beings. Many of these relationships confirmed the classical estimate of a person’s “worthiness,” viz, what was important was not legal status but “disciplina et mores” (“education and character”).

Such friendships easily carried over into the religious life of the slave, for there was no cult preferred by slaves to which a freedman or freeborn person would not have wanted to belong, even if the actual social events tended to be socially homogeneous (Bömer).

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<sup>8</sup>Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988.

NT New (Neues, Nouveau) Testament  
viz namely

For many, self-sale into slavery with anticipation of manumission was regarded as the most direct means to be integrated into Greek and Roman society. As such, in stark contrast to New World slavery in the 17th–19th cents, Greco-Roman slavery functioned as a process rather than a permanent condition, as a temporary phase of life by means of which an outsider obtained “a place within a society that had no natural obligations of kinship or guest-friendship towards him” (Wiedemann, p. 2).

Furthermore, the early Christians may well have regarded slaves as persons more highly than appears to have been the case in the surrounding cultures because of the Christians’ strong disagreement with the prevailing attitude toward work and thus toward the persons who had to work to earn a living, including those in slavery. Cicero, e.g., claimed that working every day for a living was not worthy of a freeborn person, and those working with their hands were involved in a “dirty business” (*De Officiis* i.150). At least Paul expected all Christians to work for their living (1 Thess. 4:11f; see Eph. 4:28).

The NT provides direct evidence that some early Christians were slaves or owners of slaves at the time the various documents were written (e.g., Philemon — Onesimus and Philemon; 1 Cor. 7:21 — “were you a slave when you were called?”; Col. 3:22–4:1; Eph. 6:5–9; 1 Tim. 6:1f; 1 Pet. 2:18–21). Often overlooked are the slaves included in the phrases “those of the household of...” (*hoi ek tōn ...*, Rom. 16:10f), “Chloe’s people” (*tōn Chloēs*, 1 Cor. 1:11), and “the household of Stephanas” (*tōn Stephana oikon*, 1 Cor. 1:16; see Acts 11:14). These phrases cover the same kind of extended households designated by the Latin term *familia*.

9

Persons in slavery under Roman law in the 1st cent A.D. could generally count on being set free by age thirty. At the beginning of the century owners were manumitting their slaves with a frequency that provoked Augustus Caesar to introduce laws restricting the numbers and ages of those who could be lawfully manumitted. From such legal texts (e.g., *Lex Aelia Sentia*, A.D. 4) it is clear that such slaves had to have reached age thirty if they were to receive Roman citizenship with their legal freedom. Pertinent inscriptions indicate, however, that large numbers, approaching 50 percent, were set free prior to their thirtieth birthdays, women more frequently than men, especially those between 15 and 20 whose owners decided to marry them.

Manumission was practiced very generously; sometimes all the slaves of an entire household were released, especially by testament upon the death of the owner. Manumissions were more than frequent occurrences; they were entirely normal and were expected. Thus very few persons are known to have reached old age in slavery, not because of ill-treatment, but

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<sup>9</sup>Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988.

cent century, centuries

because they had already been released before dying as freedmen/women in their thirties, forties, fifties, or more (Alföldy, pp. 105f).

This, then, is the context in which such strongly debated texts as 1 Cor. 7:21 and Philem. 8–16 must be understood. The slave revolts and armies of runaway slaves proposed by some scholars as the background for these texts simply did not exist in the 1st cent A.D. When Paul, in the earliest Christian text dealing with slavery (1 Cor. 7:21–24), mentions the possibility of the manumission of Christian slaves, he is not only speaking of a normal, everyday occurrence; he is referring to an event over which the enslaved person had very little control. For manumissions were carried out to advance the interests of the owners and to keep the system functioning. Thus there would have been no point for him to have urged Christian slaves to “remain in slavery” (so Zürcher Bibel, Bible de Jérusalem, Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift), for there was little influence the slave could have over the timing of his or her manumission apart from offering the owner an attractive sum of money or pleading with the owner to delay manumission for the slave’s personal or financial advantage. Likewise, Paul’s urging Christian slaves to “take freedom” (so Moff, RSV, NEB, JB, NIV, TEV) would seem in these circumstances to be superfluous. The point of his admonition (the imperative *chrēsai* in v 21d must be completed from the context) is to “use” or “live according to” the new identity in Christ (the “calling”) that has become more fundamental than any social, legal, or religious status (see 1 Cor. 7:19).

Runaway slaves were not a problem in the 1st cent A.D. indeed, Onesimus may well have not at all “run away” from Philemon’s household but rather left a difficult situation to seek Paul’s advice and intervention. In this social-legal context Paul’s brief masterpiece of sensitive persuasion sent to Philemon and “the church in his house” is best seen in part as a request not to delay Onesimus’s manumission because of any misdeeds (v 18) but rather to forgive him and to manumit him very soon (v 16: “no longer as a slave but...as a beloved brother”). Paul may have hoped that Onesimus would be sent back to help him, now as Philemon’s freedman (v 13).

10

The importance of the “household” (*oikos*) in the economy of the Roman empire, and of the slaves within these households, can hardly be overestimated for a proper understanding of the economic context of the NT. Compulsory labor has taken a variety of forms, among which are debt-bondage, clientship, peonage, helotage, serfdom, and chattel slavery (the “slavery” of the

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Moff J. Moffatt, *A New Translation of the Bible* (1926)

RSV Revised Standard Version

NEB New English Bible

JB Jerusalem Bible

NIV New International Version

v verse; *versus*

<sup>10</sup>Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988.

NT New (Neues, Nouveau) Testament

NT period). Whatever the form, the concept of compulsion is basically different from the one implied by “hired labor,” which abstracts a person’s capacity for work from the person as such.

In the NT period, the closer Christian missionaries came to Rome the more the societies they encountered had come to depend on persons in slavery as the basic labor force, as essential components of the imperial economy, and as a normal part of the daily life of most families. Jewish missionaries such as Paul were already well acquainted with slavery, even in the Jerusalem temple where the priests relied on slaves to assist them in their ministrations. But they had not experienced there a true slave economy, such as the household of L. C. Secundus, who during the reign of Nero had four hundred slaves in his town house alone.

Whereas freeborn persons dominated small-scale (subsistence) farming and small-scale trading in the cities, slaves dominated and virtually monopolized large-scale production in the cities and the countryside (Finley, *Ideology*, p. 82). Those in slavery thus provided the greatest amount of immediate income from property. The Romans especially had learned how to use slaves not only to make a living but also to make money.

In such an economic context it was virtually impossible for anyone to conceive of abolishing slavery as a legal-economic institution. To have turned all the slaves into free day laborers would have been to create an economy in which those at the bottom would have suffered even more insecurity and potential poverty than before. To be sure, according to all known traditions, neither Jesus nor His immediate followers owned slaves; nor did Paul, Barnabas, or Timothy. So both the example of Jesus and His great concern for the poor proved to be a challenge for many early Christians to conceive of themselves as living already among themselves in an alternative social-legal environment (note how Paul appeals to Philemon to release Onesimus sooner than he may have planned). For the author of 1Clem 55:2 Christ’s love working through humble spirits has motivated some Christians to sell themselves in order to have money to buy the freedom of others (see ShepHerm Mand 8:10; Sim 1:8; Ign Polyc 4:3).

Because the preaching of the gospel called into existence congregations that began to function as alternative households, the penetration of the gospel into the Roman extended family, made up of both freeborn and slaves, threatened in no small way its economic structure (Drexhage, p. 4).

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1Clem 1 Clement  
ShepHerm Shepherd of Hermas  
Mand Mandates  
Sim Similitudes  
Ign Ignatius of Antioch  
Polyc Epistle to Polycarp

<sup>11</sup>Bromiley, G. W. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001, c1979-1988.

## ***Lesson 25 – December 25<sup>th</sup>: Philemon Intro & 1-25***

### **EXPLORE IT**

1. What do we learn about Philemon?
2. Who is Onesimus?
3. In what ways did people become slaves in the Roman empire?
4. Who was always a part of Paul's prayers? (1:4)
5. What had Philemon done for other Christians in the region? (1:7)
6. What type of attitude did Paul project toward Philemon? (1:8-9)
7. How did Paul describe his relationship with Onesimus? (1:10-11)
8. What was Paul's motivation for sending Onesimus back to Philemon when Paul could have used him as a helper? (1:12-14)
9. What happened to Onesimus during the time he had been away? (1:15-16)
10. How did Paul want Philemon to greet Onesimus when he returned? (1:17)
11. Of what debt did Paul remind Philemon? (1:19)
12. What response from Philemon did Paul anticipate? (1:20-21) Why?
13. For what future event did Paul hope? (1:22)

### **GET IT**

14. Why did Paul begin this letter complimenting Philemon's love and faith?
15. Why was Paul urging Philemon to think beyond his legal rights with Onesimus?

### **APPLY IT**

16. What is your reaction when someone says he or she is praying for you?
17. What principles does Paul demonstrate that we should learn in our relationships?