

PHILIPPIANS

Lesson One (1:1-11)

Salutation (1:1-2)

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

V.1 Paul And Timothy – In his earlier years, Paul had been known by the Hebrew name Saul. He was raised a strict Pharisee (Acts 26:5; Phil. 3:5) and was loyal to the Jewish traditions. This misguided loyalty led him to assist in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) and to persecute the Lord’s church (Gal. 1:13-14). When Saul was converted on the road to Damascus, he realized that all his Jewish zeal and legalistic righteousness were worthless. (See Phil. 3:4-11) He became an apostle and was sent forth to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18). On the second and third of his great missionary journeys, he traveled to Philippi.

Timothy was a younger co-worker of the apostle Paul. His mother was a devout Jewish woman (Acts 16:1; II Tim. 1:5), but his father was a Greek. Timothy was converted by Paul and became his assistant. He is named in six epistles as Paul’s “co-author” (II Cor., Phil., Col., I & II Thess., Phlm.). Timothy was with Paul in Philippi on both the second and third missionary journeys, and the Philippians knew his worth (Phil. 2:22).

At the writing of this epistle, both Paul and Timothy were in Rome, where Paul was imprisoned and awaiting trial.

Servants Of Christ Jesus – Paul was so well known among his Philippian brethren that he felt no need to mention the fact that he was an apostle, as is stated in most of his other epistles. The only title is “servant” or “slave.” The Greek word means simply a slave, a person owned by someone else. In the world of the first century, a slave had no legal or civil rights. He was entirely at his master’s disposal. Paul gladly accepted this position of humble servanthood for the Master.

The word “Christ” means “the anointed one” and is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” In the Old Testament, at least three types of people were anointed: prophets (Isa. 61:1), priests (Exod. 29:7), and

kings (I Sam. 15:1). God’s only Son was anointed to be all three.

“Jesus” was the historical name given by the angel to both Mary (Luke 1:31) and Joseph (Matt. 1:21). It is the same as the Old Testament name Joshua, and means “Jehovah is salvation.”

To All The Saints In Christ Jesus – The saints are “the holy ones.” To be holy means to be “set apart” for special ownership and use. Every Christian should consider himself a saint, set apart for the service of God. No elite, separate class of sainthood is to be found in the church of the New Testament.

Who Are At Philippi – Philippi is a city with an interesting history. For a long time, it was just another obscure village of Macedonia, the northeast province of ancient Greece. Then gold was discovered nearby, and suddenly the little village was important. Philip, the king of Macedonia, took over the gold and renamed the city in his own honor. The gold enabled Philip to hire soldiers and begin the unification of all the separate cities and provinces of Greece. His son, Alexander the Great, led the Greek armies to conquer the entire Mediterranean world. Later, the Roman armies conquered Greece and made Philippi a Roman colony.

In Acts 16, Paul was on his second missionary journey when he had a vision in the night. He saw a man of Macedonia beseeching him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When Paul got to Macedonia, he began his work in Philippi. It was here that he converted Lydia, the seller of purple. It was here that he cast out a spirit of divination from a slave girl. And it was here that he was cast into jail and converted the Philippian jailer. The church in Philippi was especially close to the apostle Paul, supporting him with frequent offerings (Phil. 4:15; II Cor. 11:9). They were a generous church, despite their deep poverty (II Cor. 8:1-5). One of the immediate reasons for writing this epistle to the Philippians was to thank them for their recent gift to Paul in his imprisonment.

With The Bishops And Deacons – A bishop is literally an “over-seer” and is equated with the elder in Titus 1:5 and 7. (See also Acts 20:17 and 28, where “guardians” or “over-seers” is this same word.) The deacon is literally a “servant.” The household servants of John 2:1-11 are called by this name.

V. 2 Grace To You – Every one of the thirteen epistles signed by Paul begins and ends with a mention of grace. The Greek word for grace is closely related to the word for joy, and means “unmerited favor or goodwill.” This means that although we are unworthy and undeserving, God likes us anyway!

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

And Peace – Peace is best defined as “well-being of the soul.” Despite outward circumstances (such as Roman imprisonment), the Christian has inner peace. He commits his anxieties to God and focuses his mind on the positive things of God (Phil. 4:6-9), and the God of peace is with him.

It has often been noted that “grace” (*charis*) is very similar in Greek to the usual Greek greeting (*chairein*). Also, “peace” was the usual Hebrew greeting (*shalom*). Since so much of Paul’s ministry involved bringing together Jews and Greeks into one body, it seems somehow appropriate that this Greek-Jew greeting should begin each of his epistles.

From God Our Father And The Lord Jesus Christ – Note how closely the work of Father and of Son are inter-connected in Philippians. At least a dozen times in this brief epistle, the Father and Son are names together in the same sentence. Perhaps one can best see this relationship between the Father’s majesty and the Son’s lordship in Phil. 2:5-11, especially verse 11.

Prayer For Philippians (1:3-11)

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

V. 3 I Thank My God – This statement of thanksgiving is also found in all of Paul’s other epistles except Galatians and Titus. It would seem that Paul must have spent a great deal of time in prayer, praying for so many different people. Before Paul could exhort the Philippians to pray (4:6), he first had to set the example.

In All My Remembrance Of You – The Philippians were very dear to Paul’s heart. He thought of them often, and every memory caused him to pause and thank God for these people.

V. 4 Always In Every Prayer Of Mine – The word for prayer used here means an “entreaty” or

“supplication” for a specific need. The New Testament commends this kind of specific prayer, as opposed to prayer that is general and vague. One special benefit of specific petitions is that we can be more keenly aware when God answers them.

Making My Prayer With Joy – Joy is one of the dominant themes of Philippians. The words “joy” and “rejoice” are found a total of eighteen times. Considering that Paul is imprisoned, facing a possible death sentence, that is a lot of joy!

Paul’s Greek readers would have been impressed with this tone of the epistle from the very beginning. Their eyes would have quickly caught the following pattern:

v. 2 “grace” – *charis*

v. 3 “I thank” – *eucharisto*

v. 4 “joy” – *chara*

V. 5 Thankful For Your Partnership In The Gospel – Their partnership (Gk. *koinonia*) included their money (4:10-15). They supported Paul, moreover, not as an act of benevolence, but as an active partnership in his work. (See II Cor. 11:9) Their missionary money was not sent because they felt sorry for Paul, but because they felt enthusiastic for the gospel! They were “partners” in the fullest sense of the word.

From The First Day Until Now – The very first day Paul and his coworkers arrived in Philippi, they found hospitality in the home of Lydia (Acts 16:15). When Paul went on to Thessalonica, the Philippian brethren sent him support more than once (Phil. 4:15-16).

V. 6 And I Am Sure – Paul’s confidence (repeated six times in this epistle) certainly seems out of character for a man waiting to face trial and possible martyrdom. Paul knew that the Lord was yet in control, and victory was assured.

He Who Began A Good Work In You – It is God who initiates the act of salvation. We do not first seek Him; rather, He first sought us. He works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (2:12-13). With God motivating and empowering us, we can then “work out” our own salvation.

Will Bring It To Completion – The saving grace of God is not just a one-time event in our lives. From the moment we come to Christ until our lives shall end, we must keep on pressing forward (3:12-14). This is God’s intention for our lives. With our cooperation, He will bring it to a successful completion.

There is a possible allusion in this verse to the making of a sacrifice or burnt offering. Just as men begin and then bring to completion the act of sacrificing, so God was working among the Philippians.

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

At The Day Of Jesus Christ – This day is probably the day of the Second Coming, the time of the consummation of the ages. The final victory of the church will be won and Jesus Christ will be acknowledged as Lord of all (2:10-11).

V. 7 It Is Right For Me To Feel Thus About You All – Paul knew the Philippians well enough to feel thankful and confident for them. His very personal attachment to them was based on their partnership in his work.

Paul said “you all” five times in this first chapter (v. 4, 7 twice, 8, and 25). Though the Philippian church apparently had some problems with disunity and personal conflicts (2:1-4; 4:2-3), Paul wanted them to know how he cared for them *all*.

Because I Hold You In My Heart – The heart is used here as the very center of Paul’s being, including both will and emotion.

For You Are All Partakers With Me Of Grace – Because they had also received God’s grace, Paul called them his “co-partners,” using much the same word as “partnership” in verse five. And as always, to receive the blessing of grace is also to receive the responsibility of service. The “grace” shared by Paul and the Philippians included their partnership in evangelism. (Notice a similar use of the word “grace” in Ephesians 3:7-8).

Both In My Imprisonment And In The Defense And Confirmation Of The Gospel – Not only had the Philippians shared in Paul’s missionary work; they also shared in his courageous stand for the gospel in Roman imprisonment. One of their number had even gone to Rome to serve Paul (2:25-30). With their support and with the help of God, Paul would defend the gospel and establish its truth even in Rome. It is noteworthy that Paul was not planning to defend himself, but the gospel.

V. 8 For God Is my Witness – Paul similarly called upon God to witness to his absolute truthfulness in Gal. 1:20.

How I Yearn For You All With The Affection Of Christ Jesus – The intensity of Paul’s feeling is well expressed in the Greek phrase he used, translated in the King James Version as “in the bowels of Jesus Christ.” The word literally means the inward parts, such as the stomach, lungs, heart, liver, etc. This area was once considered the seat of emotions in a man. The ancient Greeks had noticed, for example, that the intense feelings of pity, compassion, homesickness, and sentimental yearning were actually “felt” more in the pit of the stomach than anywhere else. Jesus felt this emotion frequently in the gospels, and Paul said that his own feeling was like that of Jesus.

V. 9 My Prayer That Your Love May Abound More And More – The specific petitions of Paul’s prayer are now listed. It is interesting that Paul did not pray primarily for their health or wealth, as often we pray for one another today. His concerns were matters of an eternal nature, beginning with the greatest of all—love. (See I Cor. 13:13).

With Knowledge And All Discernment – Love is not blind. Real love should abound with knowledge and discernment. This means that love should have perception that is sharpened by experience. Love should perceive, for instance, when to be gentle and when to be stern. Love always wants to meet the needs of the one who is loved, and perception helps the lover know which course of action to take.

Love without knowledge may be a misguided, pointless love. Knowledge without love profits nothing (I Cor. 13:2). Paul prayed for a full portion of both to be given his readers.

V. 10 So That You May Approve What Is Excellent – The word “approve” was the classical term for assaying metals to determine their genuineness. The words “what is excellent” were used by Greek philosophers to refer to “the things that really matter.” Paul wanted the Philippians to be able to test and prove out in their own lives the things that really matter. He wanted to spare them the tragedy of wasting all their days in trivial affairs of no lasting consequence (I Cor. 3:12-15). A similar thought is found in Romans 12:2, where they are exhorted to “prove” the will of God in their transformed lives.

And May Be Pure And Blameless For The Day Of Christ – The word “pure” probably first meant to “be tested in sunlight” where any imperfection would be seen. The word “blameless” meant “without stumbling.” Paul knew that the Philippians, like all Christians, still had some impurities in their lives and still sometimes stumbled. He prayed that they might grow on toward perfection (3:12-14), never content to settle for something less. Then at the day of Christ’s second coming, Paul could rejoice that they, too, had finished the course and kept the faith (II Tim. 4:7).

V. 11 Filled With The Fruits Of Righteousness – This fruit (not plural, but singular as in Gal. 5:22) is the harvest which Christ’s righteousness should produce in our lives. Our own lives should exhibit the same kind of right living that Jesus had. The Spirit of Christ living in us will also produce love, joy, peace, patients, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Which Come Through Jesus Christ – The fruit of righteousness is not something we manufacture on our

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

own. Paul had long since abandoned the futile attempt for self-righteousness and knew that the only true righteousness was based on faith in Jesus Christ and came from God (3:9).

To The Glory And Praise Of God – God’s glory is his own majesty and shining splendor. In the scriptures, this word “glory” is often surrounded with the imagery of brilliant light (I Tim. 6:16). We can do nothing to enhance the glory of God, but we can acknowledge it by our fruit-filled lives. We praise God not only with our lips, but also with our lives.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Who was Timothy? Was he of any special importance to the Philippians?
2. Has your understanding of words been influenced by ecclesiastical usage? What are “saints”? What are “bishops”? What are “deacons”?
3. What words are always found in the opening of Paul’s epistles? What is their significance?
4. What kind of “prayer” was Paul talking about in verse four?
5. What did “partnership in the gospel” mean for the Philippians? What will it mean for us?
6. Paul spoke of the defense of the gospel in verse seven. Does the gospel need to be defended?
7. Why does the King James Version employ the phrase “bowels of Jesus Christ”?

8. Is it wrong to pray for health and wealth? Could our prayers indicate our appraisal of “the things that really matter”?
9. Is love blind? Does love always forget, forgive, and overlook? How does this work with parental love? How does this work with God’s love?
10. Who gets the credit for the fruits of righteousness we produce? Why?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Briefly describe the background of Paul.
2. “In his earlier years, Paul had been known by the _____ name _____.”
3. During which missionary journeys did Paul visit Philippi?
4. Timothy’s mother was a devout _____ woman, but his father was a _____.
5. How many epistles list Timothy as Paul’s co-author? List these epistles.
6. During which missionary journeys did Timothy accompany Paul?
7. Why would Paul apply the term “servants” to himself and Timothy? What legal standing did a servant have in the ancient world?
8. Where were Paul and Timothy when Philippians was written?
9. Explain the meaning of the words “Christ” and “Jesus.”
10. Summarize what this lesson teaches about “saints.”

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

11. Summarize the history and background of Philippi.
12. List one immediate reason for Paul writing Philippians.
13. Explain the meaning of “bishops” and “deacons.”
14. What does this lesson teach about “grace” and “peace”?
15. In Philippians, how many times are the Father and Son named together in the same sentence?
16. Name the two epistles, written by Paul, which do not contain the statement of thanksgiving “I thank my God.”
17. Explain the meaning of the word “prayer” in verse 4.
18. “_____ is one of the dominant themes of Philippians. The words “_____” and “_____” are found a total of _____ times.”
19. Briefly define these Greek words: charis, eucharisto, chara, and koinonia.
20. Explain the meaning of “I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
21. How many times does Paul express “I am sure.” in this epistle?
22. In what way can Christians “work out” their own salvation?
23. Explain the meaning of “...how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”
24. Based upon verse 9, what were the primary concerns of Paul’s prayers. How does this compare with the primary concerns of your own prayers?
25. Why is it so important to combine love, knowledge, and discernment?
26. Explain the background/meanings of these words in verse 10: approve, pure, and blameless.
27. Explain “the fruits of righteousness” in verse 11.
28. What imagery often surrounds the word “glory”?
29. What is the most important lesson you have learned from this section, and how can you apply this lesson in your own life?

Lesson Two (1:12-30)

Good News From Prison (1:12-18)

12 I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel; 17 the former proclaim Christ out of partisanship, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.

V. 12 I Want You To Know, Brethren – When Paul was imprisoned, many questions must have swept over the Philippian church. Is all lost? Will Paul be forced to quit? Are we supporting a hopeless cause? So Paul wrote to them to set the record straight and to put their fears to rest.

That What Has Happened To Me – The account of what had happened to Paul is recorded in the last few chapters of Acts. Following his arrest and the false accusations of the Jews, Paul appealed to Caesar to hear his case. When he finally was taken to Rome, he was

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

confined to a private dwelling, secured at his own expense. Although he was free to preach to all who came to him, he was kept in chains under constant guard (Eph. 6:20). During this imprisonment, he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Has Really Served To Advance The Gospel – Paul was in chains, but the gospel was not. In addition to the opportunities to preach and write, as noted above, the next verse tells of another unique opportunity for the gospel made possible by imprisonment.

V. 13 It Has Become Known Throughout The Whole Praetorian Guard – The praetorian guard was an elite body of 10,000 soldiers who made up the emperor's personal army. They were distinguished by special privileges and double pay. Paul was under the special guard of these soldiers as an imperial prisoner. Every hour of the day, Paul was shackled to a praetorian soldier, connected by a length of chain. Perhaps Paul could not get away from them, but neither could they get away from him! Hour after hour, until another soldier would come to relieve him, each soldier was Paul's captive audience. Soon the gospel message had spread through the entire cohort.

That My Imprisonment Is For Christ – Soon every soldier knew this was no ordinary prisoner—he was an ambassador of Jesus. Paul does not say that every praetorian soldier became a Christian, but they did all hear the gospel.

V. 14 And Most Of The Brethren Have Been Made Confident – How could the imprisonment of a fellow preacher make one feel more confident? It was Paul's attitude and continuing success that made the difference. The forces of evil were doing their worst—but Paul was still cheerful, optimistic, and preaching!

In The Lord – It must not be overlooked that their confidence was not in Paul or in themselves. Their confidence was in the Lord. The victory belonged to Him.

And Are Much More Bold To Speak The Word Of God Without Fear – It was no small thing to proclaim God's word in the world of the first century. The Roman government, with Nero as emperor, was increasingly hostile to Christianity. The Jewish leaders led an active crusade to stir up trouble against it. The common people were tolerant of practically any religion, but were totally intolerant of a religion that claimed to be the only true one.

V. 15 Some Indeed Preach Christ From Envy And Rivalry – Incredible as it may seem, some men were being motivated to preach the gospel by base motives such as envy and strife. Envy is more than simple jealousy; it is pain at the success of someone else.

It does not want to equal or surpass another person's success; it wants to see that person's success ruined. Rivalry is strife, expressing open hostility. Both envy and rivalry are listed among the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21.

But Others From Good Will – Those who preached the gospel out of base motivations did not prevent Paul from seeing all the rest, who preached with a heart of sincere good will.

V. 16 The Latter Do It Out Of Love – This second group, those preaching from good will, were motivated by love. In context here, this love is not only love for God, but also love for Paul himself.

Knowing That I Am Put Here For The Defense Of The Gospel – The good-hearted preachers appreciated the reason for Paul's imprisonment. They were sympathetic for both Paul and the Gospel he preached. They were concerned for the defense of the gospel which Paul would make before the emperor.

For an example of the kind of defense Paul would likely make before Caesar, see Acts 17:22-31; 22:1-21; 26:1-29; and I Cor. 15:1-11. The best defense of the gospel is the historical truth of the risen Christ.

V. 17 The Former Proclaim Christ Out Of Partisanship – Referring again to the first group, Paul named their motivation as "partisanship." This word means selfishness or personal ambition. It describes the person who will do absolutely anything to advance his own causes. Like envy and rivalry named in verse fifteen, partisanship is also a work of the flesh.

Not Sincerely, But Thinking To Afflict Me In My Imprisonment – Those who operated from impure motives somehow thought that by preaching the gospel, they would afflict Paul. They may have thought to arouse Paul's jealousy at their success, or they may have thought to stir up more government opposition to preachers.

V. 18 What Then? – If these people thought they would make Paul sick with jealousy, they greatly misjudged him. They would have found it hard to understand, but Paul preached with complete honesty and selflessness (I Thess. 2:3-6). He could only rejoice at the successful preaching of others.

Whether In Pretense Or In Truth, Christ Is Proclaimed – What really mattered was not the petty evaluation of one another's motives, but the proclaiming of the message. Paul was perfectly content to leave the matter of motives between the other preachers and their Master.

It should be noted that Paul did not condone any and every doctrinal error just so long as they preached about Jesus. The problem of doctrinal error will be

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

confronted later, in Chapter three. In the situation of this passage, the preachers were preaching the truth, but their own motive were poor.

And In That I Rejoice – Just as Paul was undaunted by the soldiers of Rome, he was unaffected by these preachers. Notice his total selflessness. If the world was hearing the truth of the gospel, he could only rejoice.

Optimism For The Future (1:19-26)

19 Yes, and I shall rejoice. For I know that through your prayers and help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

V. 19 Yes, And I Shall Rejoice – At this point, Paul turned his attention from the events of the past to the prospect for the future. As far as the eye could see down the path that lay ahead of him, the Lord was still in control and winning the victory.

Through Your Prayers And The Help Of The Spirit Of Jesus Christ – Paul was counting on two powerful resources to help him be victorious. The first was prayer offered in his behalf by the faithful Philippian church. Having faced so many perils already (II Cor. 11:23-28), he knew first hand the sustaining power of their prayers. The second resource was the help of the Holy Spirit. The word for “help” used here by Paul goes back to the Greek theater. It was customary for a wealthy patron of the arts to provide all the necessary equipment, costumes, salaries, etc. to make the production possible. It was this word for the generous provision of all necessities that Paul used in reference to the Holy Spirit’s “help.”

This Will Turn Out For My Deliverance – The word Paul used for “deliverance” may also be translated “salvation,” as in the King James Version. One translation tends to look toward a release from imprisonment, while the other looks toward a final home in heaven when he dies. In light of Paul’s statement in

verse 25, he probably had reference to release from prison.

V. 20 As It Is My Eager Expectation And Hope – Paul “watched with outstretched head” in eager confidence. He did not shrink back in fear of the coming consequences.

That I Shall Not At All Be Ashamed – Paul knew that as long as he stood with Jesus, no one could put him to shame. He was also eager to see that others should not be ashamed. (See Rom. 1:16; II Tim. 1:8, 16; I Pet. 4:16).

But That With Full Courage Now As Always Christ Will Be Honored In My Body – The word for “full courage” was the term used in ancient Athens for the right of free speech which belonged to every citizen. The main thought in Paul’s mind, apparently, was that he would have the boldness to speak out for Christ before the Emperor Nero.

Whether By Life Or By Death – Paul was not taking it for granted that he would escape death. Verse 27 also mentions the possibility that he might not be released. The most important thing was that Jesus would stand by Paul in life or in death, and Paul would live or die to honor Him.

V. 21 For To Me To Live Is Christ – As Paul had written years earlier to the Galatians, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Paul had learned the secret of discipleship, self-denial, and had let Jesus take over his life (Matt. 16:24). He had given up all his former life in order to gain Christ and be found in Him (Phil. 3:8-9). In doing this, Paul was not accomplishing the impossible; rather, he was setting an example he expected all of us to follow (Phil. 3:17).

And To Die Is Gain – Death would be gain in at least two ways. First, Christ and his kingdom would be honored by Paul’s martyrdom (v. 20). Secondly, Paul himself would have great gain by going to be with Jesus (v. 23). It is this second thought that Paul carries into the following verses.

V. 22 If It Is To Be Life In The Flesh – Life, not death, is indeed what Paul supposed the outcome would be (v. 19, 25).

Fruitful Labor For Me – Paul’s only attachment to this life was his burning desire to evangelize and teach. It was not so much in his own interest as in the interests of others (2:4) that Paul wanted to stay alive.

Yet Which I Shall Choose I Cannot Tell – More accurately, “what I shall choose I do not make known.”

V. 23 I Am Hard Pressed Between The Two – Paul was between a rock and a hard place. He faced not two dreadful consequences, but two appealing

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

possibilities. The choice was not really Paul's to make—and it was just as well, for Paul had a very hard time deciding.

My Desire Is To Depart And Be With Christ – Paul had a desire so strong that the word used by him here is usually translated “lust” or “craving.” The word for “depart” is a picturesque word used when a ship is untied from its mooring and sails away, or when a tent is taken down in preparation for a journey. (See II Cor. 5:1-4)

What happens to a Christian when he dies? Some passages in the New Testament seem to indicate that he “sleeps” until the second coming of Christ (I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thess. 4:14-17) and then is raised from the dead. However, a greater number of passages indicate that the departed Christian goes immediately to be with Jesus (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; John 11:25-26; Acts 7:55-59; II Cor. 5:1-8; Phil. 1:23; Rev. 6:9-11).

For That Is Far Better – Paul knew what it was like to be in the presence of the Lord (Acts 9:3-6). He also tells of a man who was caught up to the third heaven and was privileged to see and hear things in Paradise. Presumably he was speaking of himself (II Cor. 12:1-7). This may help us understand Paul's seemingly unnatural desire to die.

V. 24 But To Remain In The Flesh Is More Necessary On Your Account – It is striking that Paul's only real reason for wanting to continue in this life was to help others.

V. 25 Convinced Of This, I Know That I Shall Remain – It was not a revelation from the Lord, but a logical analysis of the situation, that caused Paul to conclude that he would be allowed to go on living. What he goes on to say in verse 27 shows that this conclusion is less than absolutely sure.

For Your Progress And Joy In The Faith – Just as the gospel was advancing (*prokope*) in verse 12 through the work of Paul, so shall the Philippians progress (*prokope*) through him.

V. 26 Ample Cause To Glory In Christ Jesus – Literally, “that your reason for boasting might overflow” in Christ Jesus.

A Challenge For The Future (1:27-30)

27 Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear omen to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of

Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine.

V. 27 Let Your Manner Of Life Be Worthy Of The Gospel – Literally, the Philippians were to “live out their citizenship” in a manner worthy of the gospel. As Roman citizens of a Roman colony, they knew something about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. This same imagery is also used in 3:20.

No Christian can live in such a way as to be worthy of the sacrifice Christ made for him. He can, however, allow his life to be shaped and directed by what he recognizes to be of supreme worth—the gospel.

Whether I Come And See You Or Am Absent – The most important thing was not whether Paul was released from prison. Paul's logical conclusion might prove to be wrong; their united stand for Christ must prove to be steadfast.

Stand Firm In One Spirit – During this same imprisonment, Paul wrote of the Christian's struggle against the hosts of wickedness (Eph. 6:10-20). The Christian must put on God's armor, and having done all, must stand.

With One Mind Striving Side By Side For The Faith Of The Gospel – Paul's emphasis on unity of purpose reaches a climax in just a few more verses (2:2). One of the most important ingredients for success in any army is unity of mind and purpose. Teamwork is required among those who would “contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

V. 28 Not Frightened In Anything By Your Opponents – Paul used the word here for a horse that is “spooked” by some small or imaginary sight and rears back in terror. Even the Roman empire should not incite them to panic.

A Clear Omen To Them Of Their Destruction – Even when they threw the Christians to the lions, the Romans could not get the best of them. The hymns of victory were a dramatic prophecy of the ultimate destruction of all who would exalt themselves against the power of God.

But Of Your Salvation, And That From God – The united unflinching stance of the Christians was a clear demonstration of their coming salvation. Do not forget, though, that salvation is not earned by a given measure of courage or earthly success. It is from God, and it is His gift (Eph. 2:8-9).

V. 29 For It Has Been Granted To You – God has given two precious privileges to the Christian. The first is obvious; the second is startling.

That You Should Not Only Believe – The capacity for faith should not be considered a human invention. It

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

is a gift of God, available to all men (II Pet. 3:9; Rev. 22:17).

But Also Suffer For His Sake – The privilege of suffering for Jesus is a gift from God. Paul had experienced it firsthand, and he could see it coming for the Philippians. This time of testing should be received with joy (James 1:2-3; I Pet. 4:12-14).

V. 30 Engaged In The Same Conflict Which You Saw And Now Hear To Be Mine – Paul’s first visit to Philippi found him beaten and thrown in jail. Now, after many other hardships and trials (II Cor. 11:23-28), he was imprisoned again. They should not be surprised if similar things happen to them.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How did imprisonment advance the gospel?
2. What were the evil motives of some preachers? What were they trying to do to Paul?
3. Should we be big-hearted and approve of all preaching, so long as it includes mention of Jesus?
4. Did Paul expect to be released from imprisonment?
5. What could have happened that would have caused Paul to be “ashamed”?
6. Why was Paul eager to die? Why did he also want to continue living?
7. What happens to the Christian when he dies?
8. What is the background of the words “manner of life” (v. 27)? Is it possible for our manner of life to be worthy of the gospel?
9. What two privileges has God given to Christians?
10. What was the example of suffering set by Paul? Was this typical or rare in the first century?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What New Testament book records the events that led to Paul’s imprisonment in Rome? Summarize these events.
2. Name the New Testament books written by Paul during his Roman imprisonment.
3. What was the “praetorian guard”?
4. Explain why “it was no small thing” to share the Gospel in the world of the First Century.
5. Explain the difference between “envy” and “jealousy.”
6. Contrast the differences between those who preach Christ from envy/rivalry and those who proclaim Jesus from good will/love.
7. In what ways could the preachers, who proclaimed Christ out of partisanship, possibly hope to afflict Paul during his imprisonment?
8. Explain Paul’s words, “whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed and in that I rejoice.”
9. List two powerful resources, in verse 19, that would help Paul be victorious. How can these resources also help you overcome difficult situations?

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

10. What is the background of the word “help” in verse 19?
11. How does the King James Version translate the word “deliverance” in verse 19?
12. What is the background of the word for “full courage” in verse 20?
13. Was Paul certain that he would escape death at the end of his imprisonment? How could Paul’s death honor Christ?
14. List two ways in which Paul’s death would be “gain.”
15. Explain the words “desire” and “depart” in verse 23.
16. List seven New Testament passages which indicate that a departed Christian goes immediately to be with Jesus.
17. According to verse 24, why did Paul want to “remain in the flesh”?
18. What is the Greek word for “progress” in verse 25?
19. What is the literal translation of “ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus”?
20. What is the literal translation of “Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel”?
21. Explain the background of the Greek word for “frightened” in verse 28.
22. Why should the capacity to believe be considered a privilege from God?
23. How can suffering for Jesus be a privilege and gift from God?
24. How was Paul treated during his first visit to Philippi?
25. What are you personally willing to endure to proclaim the Gospel? Take a moment to ask God to give you the strength and boldness to share the Good News with others.
26. What is the most important lesson that you have learned from this section, and how can you apply this lesson in everyday life?

Lesson Three (2:1-11)

The Mind Of Christ (2:1-11)

1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, 6 who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

V. 1 So If There Is Any Encouragement In Christ – This verse establishes a fourfold pattern of Christian participation and involvement. On the basis of this, Paul will go on in the next verse to issue a fourfold commandment for unity. This unity is made possible by an attitude of humility and servanthood (v. 3-4). Our perfect example of this attitude is Christ (v. 5-8).

The encouragement in Christ named here is the “exhortation” that we know because we are in Him, and He is in us. If there is any awareness of this urging in

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

the believer, he is called upon to respond to the challenge of verse two.

Any Incentive Of Love – The word “incentive” carries the ideas of both “comfort” and “encouragement or urging.” Love has a strong ability to urge and constrain (II Cor. 5:14).

Any Participation In The Spirit – Participation (*koinonia*) can also be translated “fellowship” or “partnership.” In fact, marriage, the closest of all human relationships, was often called “the *koinonia* of life.”

Our intimate involvement with the Holy Spirit is a strong incentive toward Christian unity. The same Spirit indwelling my life is also living in you. We have something in common far more precious than a common blood-line, a common nationality, or a common friendship. If I reject you and the Spirit in you, I am rejecting a part of myself.

Any Affection And Sympathy – As in Chapter one, verse eight, the King James version has “bowels” instead of “affection” as a translation of the Greek work *splangchna*. As before, this pit of the stomach area is used figuratively to represent man’s most tender emotions. The word “sympathy” is the same word often used in the Old Testament for the tender mercies of God.

To sum up verse one: If the reader has any sensitivity whatsoever to the spiritual dimension of life, let him respond to the challenge of the next verse.

V. 2 Complete My Joy – The Philippians were already Paul’s “joy and crown” (4:1), but perhaps one thing was still lacking: their total unity in the Lord.

By Being Of The Same Mind – Literally, “set your minds on the same thing.” The point of agreement is not so much in the realm of doctrine and opinion, but in the unity of attitude and purpose. A further illustration of this “same mind” is the mind of Christ (v. 5-8). It is the attitude of humility and servanthood that all Christians must share.

Having The Same Love – No two men will ever agree completely in all their ideas. For this reason, it is not a unity of the head but a unity of the heart which Paul seeks.

Being In Full Accord – Literally, being “joined in soul.”

And Of One Mind – As in the beginning of the verse, the word used (“setting your minds on one thing”) has reference to attitude rather than doctrine. Absolute doctrinal conformity is impossible; for every time a Christian learns more truth, he would have to dis-fellowship all his brothers.

V. 3 Do Nothing From Selfishness Or Conceit – The word used here for “selfishness” is the same word Paul used for “partisanship” in 1:17. A person

motivated by selfishness will do anything to advance his own cause, even stepping on the fallen bodies of his brothers to reach the top. So long as people are motivated by selfishness, unity is impossible.

“Conceit” is a very graphic word, literally meaning “empty glory.” So long as people are seeking the empty glory that comes from men (John 5:44), they are out of tune with God and unity is impossible.

In Humility Count Others Better Than Yourselfes – The Christian must “set his mind in a humble, lowly way” and consider the rights of others ahead of his own. The perfect example of all this is Jesus Christ, who did not try to advance his own position in heaven, who had divine glory and then emptied himself, who died on the cross that others might live.

V. 4 Let Each Of You Look Not Only To His Own Interests, But Also To The Interests Of Others – This attitude is the functional key to Christian unity. It was manifested in Christ, as well as in Paul (2:17), Timothy (2:20-21), and Epaphroditus (2:25-30).

V. 5 Have This Mind Among Yourselves – Literally, “set your mind this way.” Every Christian should have the same attitude of the Master, who became servant of all. He who washed his disciples’ feet was not establishing a worship ritual, but leaving us an example of humble servanthood. Since the servant is not greater than his Master, we have no right to think of ourselves as “too good” for any lowly service.

Which You Have In Christ Jesus – What follows is one of the grandest passages in all the Bible to teach the deity of the Lord Jesus. It was not for this purpose, however, that the passage was written. It is the ultimate example of loving, sacrificial servanthood.

V. 6 Who Though He Was In The Form Of God – In the beginning (John 1:1) before anything was created (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17), Jesus existed in heaven with the Father. He existed in the very “form” of God. Unlike our English word, the Greek word for “form” is more than just an outward or superficial similarity. It points to the very essence of God the Father and says Jesus was the same. He was not only with God—He was God! (John 1:1)

It is quite impossible to define the precise nature of the Trinity using human thought and human language. In some divine way, the Son is of the same essence and being as the Father, and yet is a separate personality. The New Testament affirms in several places that Jesus is God (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; II Peter 1:1), but always maintains the careful distinction between the Son and the Father.

The Son is God. The Father is God
But the Son is not the Father.

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

Did Not Count The Equality With God A Thing To Be Grasped – Paul was not trying to prove the deity of Christ to the Philippians. They already accepted it as true. Instead, he was reminding them that Jesus could have clung to his divine rights and privileges, but did not. His manner of existence was equal to that of the Father, and he might well have decided to “hang on to it at all costs,” but he did not.

V. 7 But Emptied Himself – Of what did Jesus empty himself? Consider the following possibilities:

- A. His heavenly glory and privileges.
- B. His omnipotence (state of being all-powerful)
- C. His omniscience (state of being all-knowing)
- D. His omnipresence (state of being everywhere present)
- E. His divine essence

It is quite obvious that Jesus laid aside the glorious privileges of heaven when he became a man. He was excluded from the Bethlehem inn, from the hearts of God’s chosen people, and from ownership of a simple place to lay his head.

What about omnipotence? As the Son of Man, Jesus put a voluntary self-limitation on his powers. He did the works which his Father gave him to do (John 5:19, 36; 14:10). He steadfastly refused to work miracles to his own advantage (Matt. 4:1-4). In a physical sense, he could become weary (John 4:6) and he could die (John 19:30). Still, his mastery of all nature and of death itself shows that he was not just a man. He was a man. And he was God.

What about omniscience? The clearest case here of a self-limitation is found in Matt. 24:36, where as the Son of Man, Jesus did not know the day or hour of his second coming. Still, he knew the hearts of his enemies, he knew when Lazarus had died, and he knew when his hour had or had not come. Even from the age of twelve, he knew his identity as the unique son of the heavenly Father (Luke 2:49).

What of omnipresence? Obviously Jesus could not be in two places at once while he was in human form. Much of his adult ministry was spent simply travelling from place to place so he could teach more people.

Finally, what of his divine essence? Did he ever cease to be God? No—never at any time. Even as he emptied himself to become fully man, he continued to be fully God.

Taking The Form Of A Servant – The kind of servant Jesus became was actually a “slave” or “servant under bondage.” He was not just a king disguised as a beggar—he actually became the most lowly among men. It was necessary that Jesus fully experience humanness and be tempted in every respect, so that he could offer

his own life to satisfy our sentence of death (Gal. 4:4-5) and become our sympathetic high priest (Heb. 4:5).

Being Born In The Likeness Of Men – It is admittedly difficult to combine Jesus’ human and divine natures. But we must do so, and we must avoid either of two extremes. Modern theologians often conclude Jesus was a very good man, but in no way God. The ancient Docetics concluded that Jesus was wholly divine, but in no way really human. When he walked in the sands of Galilee, for instance, he left no footprints! The refusal to admit that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh was one of the earliest heresies of the church (II John 7).

V. 8 And Being Found In Human Form – The word for “form” is not the same as the word for “form” in verse six. This time the word implies a changeability, or a form that is not permanent (I Cor. 7:31). Jesus was always God, even from the beginning, and always continued to be God. At a given point in time, he became a man, taking on a nature which would not be permanent.

He Humbled Himself – As if it were too little that Jesus had stooped from the highest heaven to the lowest earth, he humbled himself even further!

And Became Obedient Unto Death – Jesus did not desire or welcome the cross. He offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death. And although he was God’s own Son, he learned obedience in the things that he suffered (Heb. 5:7-8). See also the beautiful parallels in Heb. 12:2 and I Peter. 2:21-14.

Even Death On A Cross – Crucifixion was one of the most hideous forms of execution ever devised by man. The Greeks used a simple upright stake, but the Romans always added the crossbeam. The victim was tied or nailed to the beams with great spikes through his wrists and feet. While the weight of the body hung from the wrists, the lungs were unable to inhale and exhale effectively. The victim would have to shift his weight to his pierced feet, thrusting himself up to gasp for breath. The hours of death on the cross were not spent quietly hanging there, but were spent in a constant struggle for breath. The ultimate cause of death was loss of blood, shock, and suffocation.

V. 9 Therefore God Has Highly Exalted Him – Literally, God has “hyper-exalted” him. (This is the only use of this word in the New Testament.) Just as Jesus made the supreme sacrifice in humiliation, so also the Father has honored him with the highest exaltation. Jesus became the perfect example of the principle he had taught his disciples: “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 14:11)

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

And Bestowed On Him The Name Which Is Above Every Name – Various suggestions have been offered as to what this “name” is. Perhaps it is “Jesus” (v. 10); perhaps it is “Lord” (v. 11); perhaps “Jesus Christ” (v. 11), or perhaps Jesus’ ultimate name is yet unknown to us. At any rate, it is not the name itself that is important. What is important is that this name or title marks Jesus as supreme above all others. He holds first rank over all the universe. He is equal with the Father.

V. 10 That At The Name Of Jesus – The “name of Jesus” could be either the name which is “Jesus,” or the name which belongs to Jesus (see above). The wording of the text does not allow us to be dogmatic in our interpretation.

Every Knee Should Bow – The knee bows in worship of the divine. No man (Acts 10:25-26) or angel (Judges 13:15-16) may receive worship, for it belongs exclusively to God (Matt. 4:10).

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.”
(Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11)

The Father thus presents the Son as the worthy object of worship.

In Heaven And On Earth And Under The Earth – Every creature must acknowledge that Christ is worthy of worship. Whether angelic or human, whether in heaven or on earth or under the earth—all must worship Jesus Christ.

The phrase “under the earth” was probably not intended to be a specific statement concerning the whereabouts of demons or of deceased humans. More likely, it just completes the sequence, indicating that any and every sphere of existence is subject to Christ.

V. 11 And Every Tongue Confess – Every creature must sooner or later recognize and admit that Jesus Christ is Lord. Those who have not made confession as an act of conversion (Rom. 10:9-10) will make their confession as an admission of defeat.

That Jesus Christ Is Lord – The full force of “Lord” (*kurios*) is not appreciated by modern, English-speaking people. This word had come through a long history of development before it was ready to serve as a fitting title for Jesus Christ.

The *kurios* was originally the owner of a piece of property. Next, the *kurios* was the owner and master of a slave. Then, when the Greek mystery religions began to develop, *kurios* was used in reference to the deity they worshipped. By this point in ancient history, then, the *kurios* was recognized as owner, obeyed as master, and honored as a god.

What happened next had tremendous impact on the word. When the translators of the Old Testament (200 B.C.) tried to translate the divine name YHWH (Jehovah) into Greek, they faced a problem. No one knew how to pronounce the sacred name, since the vowels were omitted. There was no way to transliterate the name from Hebrew to Greek, letter by letter. The solution was to translate YHWH as *kurios*. Thus, especially to the Jewish mind, the title *kurios* even had reference to God Himself.

All of this came together to make up the meaning of our word “Lord.” And Jesus Christ is Lord.

To The Glory Of God The Father – There is no competition in heaven between Father and Son. One does not seek glory above or apart from the Other. When the Son is worshipped as Lord, it brings glory to the Father. When the Father is worshipped, it is along with, and by means of, the Son.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is “participation in the Spirit”? What does it have to do with unity?
2. What does it mean to be “of the same mind”? Do we have to think alike before we can have unity?
3. How can we count others better than ourselves if they are actually inferior? How can the example of Jesus help us in this?
4. What two or three key words would you choose to describe the mind of Christ?
5. Was Jesus God?
6. Of what did Jesus empty himself?
7. To what extent could “God in disguise” actually experience what it is like to be a man?

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

8. What is the name which is above every name?
9. Why was Paul careful to include all three regions—in heaven, on earth, and under the earth?
10. What is the history and meaning of the title “Lord”?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why are humility and servanthood essential to Christian unity?
2. Explain the meaning of “incentive” in verse 1.
3. What is the Greek word for “partnership,” and how can it be translated?
4. What role does the Holy Spirit play in uniting all Christians?
5. What is the Greek word for “affection” in verse 1? Explain the meaning of this word.
6. Provide a literal translation of “by being of the same mind” in verse 2. Explain whether these words focus upon unity in doctrine/opinion or attitude and purpose.
7. What is the literal translation of “being in full accord” in verse 2?
8. Why is it impossible to have absolute doctrinal conformity?
9. “So long as people are motivated by _____ is impossible.”
10. What is the literal meaning of “conceit” in verse 3?
11. What did Jesus do to provide a perfect example of humility and counting others better than Himself?
12. Provide a literal translation of “have this mind among yourselves” in verse 5.
13. “Every Christian should have the same _____ of the _____ who became _____ of all.”
14. What do verses 5 and 6 teach about the deity of the Lord Jesus?
15. Explain the meaning of the Greek word for “form” in verse 6. What does this word teach about the deity of Jesus?
16. List 6 New Testament verses which teach that Jesus is God.
17. Explain the words “did not count the equality with God a thing to be grasped” in verse 6.
18. Provide a brief definition of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.
19. “As the Son of Man, Jesus put a _____ - _____ on His _____.”
20. “The kind of servant Jesus became was actually a ‘_____’ or ‘_____.’”
21. Why was it necessary for Jesus to fully experience humanness and be tempted in every respect?
22. What did the ancient Docetics conclude about Jesus?

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

23. “The refusal to admit that _____ had come in the _____ was one of the earliest _____ of the church.”
24. Explain the meaning of the word “form” in verse 8.
25. Summarize the teaching of Hebrews 5:7-8.
26. Contrast the type of “cross” used by the Greeks and Romans.
27. Describe the process of executing a victim by crucifixion.
28. In crucifixion, what was the ultimate cause of death?
29. What is the literal meaning of “highly exalted” in verse 9? How many times is this word used in the New Testament?
30. Explain the phrase “under the earth” in verse 10.
31. “Every creature must sooner or later _____ and _____ that Jesus Christ is _____. Those who have not made _____ as an act of _____ (Rom. 10:9-10) will make their _____ as an _____ of _____.”
32. What is the Greek word for “Lord” in verse 11?
33. Explain the development of the Greek word “kurios.”
34. What problem arose in the translation of “Jehovah” into Greek?
35. “Thus, especially to the Jewish mind, the title _____ even had reference to _____.”

36. What was the most significant lesson you have learned from this section? What impact will this lesson have in your life?

Lesson Four (2:12-30)

Work Out Your Own Salvation (2:12-18)

12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

14 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

V. 12 Therefore, My Beloved, As You Have Always Obeyed – The word “therefore” points to a connection with something said earlier. The point of connection here lies in the “obedience” of Jesus in verse eight and the fact that the Philippian brethren have “always obeyed.” They have obeyed both God and his spokesman Paul.

Not Only As In My Presence But Much More In My Absence – Paul had problems in other places with people turning against him when he was gone from them (II Cor. 11:1-4; Gal. 4:12-20), but he had confidence that the Philippians were more loyal.

Work Out Your Own Salvation – The verb “work out” means to “accomplish, carry out, or carry through with something.” The verb is a present imperative, meaning that we must “carry out and keep on carrying out” our salvation.

In a single stroke, this phrase corrects at least three possible errors in understanding salvation:

1. Our salvation was *not* a one-time past event.
2. We are *not* totally passive in salvation.
3. We can *not* be saved by the efforts of others in our behalf.

With Fear And Trembling – Fear is something of a paradox in the New Testament. It is easy to go to one extreme or the other in promoting or relieving fear. On

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

the one hand, we must conduct ourselves in fear as long as we live (I Pet. 1:17) lest we be judged to have failed to reach the promised rest (Heb. 4:1). We should fear God who has the power to cast us into hell (Luke 12:5). On the other hand, we are told not to fear, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom (Luke 12:32). We did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear (Rom. 8:15). Perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18).

This dilemma is partly caused by the wide range of meanings of the word "fear." Sometimes it means terror, alarm, and fright. At other times it means reverence, respect, and awe. In this verse, Paul did not encourage a cringing terror or alarm, but a sober respect for the consequence of failure.

V. 13 For God Is At Work In You – Verse thirteen must always be considered along with verse twelve, for the two verses make up a single sentence. If verse twelve is isolated from its context, you will have an unhealthy emphasis on self-earned salvation and an unnatural fear of failure. Just remember this important fact: God is at work in you!

Both To Will And To Work For His Good Pleasure – Both our decision to serve and the service itself would have been impossible without God working in us. While God allows—and requires—our participation in salvation, the ultimate credit for salvation belongs solely to God.

Verse thirteen must also be taken in context. Isolated, it might be taken as proof of man's total depravity and inability to make any positive response in salvation. Verses twelve and thirteen, taken together, provide a remarkable balance. They show the beautiful joint participation of God and man in the plan of salvation.

V. 14 Do All Things Without Grumbling Or Questioning – Christians should serve God with an eager willingness. They should not "grumble" as the children of Israel did when they "murmured" in the wilderness (Exo. 15:24; 16:2, 7, 8). They should not "question" as the Pharisees did when they stood back questioning and complaining about Jesus (Luke 5:22).

V. 15 Blameless And Innocent, Children Of God Without Blemish – William Barclay notes the following progression in these three descriptions of the Christian. First is what he must be to the world—blameless. His life is of such purity that no one can find anything in it to blame. Second is what he must be in himself—innocent. Even beyond what the world can observe in his outward behavior, he must know in himself an integrity of purpose, an "unmixed" character. Third is what he must be in the sight of God—without blemish. This word was

often used in the Old Testament of the animals which were chosen to be sacrificed to God. Before they were fit to be brought before Him, they had to be totally without flaw or blemish.

If the Philippians are seen as a sacrifice offered to God, then Paul is seen as the libation, or drink offering, poured out upon that sacrifice (v. 17)

In The Midst Of A Crooked And Perverse Generation – The word "crooked" could be used for both a "crooked" road or a "dishonest" man. The word "perverse" means "thoroughly twisted and distorted." Together they describe people who are warped out of moral alignment with God. It should be noted that the moral atmosphere of the first century was no worse than that of the twentieth century. Any generation—or any person—that does not know God is warped.

"They are no longer his children because of their blemish, they are a perverse and crooked generation." (Deuteronomy 32:5)

Among Whom You Shine As Lights In The World – The darker the night, the brighter the light! Just as God appointed the sun, moon, and stars as lights (*phoster*) in the generations of men upon the earth. As Jesus was the light of the world (John 8:12), so are his disciples (Matt. 5:14). They must not obscure the light by blemishes and impurity, but let it shine, so men will give glory to God (Matt. 5:16).

V. 16 Holding Fast The Word Of Life – The Greek word for "holding fast" may also be translated "holding forth." If translated as "holding fast," the reference is to personal commitment to the truth of the gospel. If understood as "holding forth," the emphasis is more on evangelism. When one thinks of the Olympic runner carrying the torch, both ideas blend into one. If the Christian is to "shine" as a light for his dark generation, he must "hold fast" and "hold forth" the gospel.

In The Day Of Christ – The last great day, the time of the consummation, as in Chapter one, verse ten.

I May Be Proud That I Did Not Run In Vain Or Labor In Vain – As a great relay runner, Paul had carried the torch of evangelism to the Philippians. If they dropped the torch or failed to pass it on to succeeding runners, Paul would have run his part of the race for nothing.

V. 17 Even If I Am To Be Poured As A Libation – Paul had the mind of Christ, the attitude of self-sacrificing servanthood. He pictured himself here as a drink offering (see Num. 28:14, 31) poured out upon the altar. His life was expendable.

Upon The Sacrificial Offering Of your Faith – Literally, "upon the sacrifice and priestly service" of

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

your faith. Paul saw their faith as a sacrifice offered in priestly service at the temple, and himself as the drink offering poured on top of it.

I Am Glad And Rejoice With You All – Paul had already stated that his only reason for living was for their progress and joy in the faith (1:24-25). If his life was used—or used up—for the benefit of their faith, Paul could only rejoice.

V. 18 Likewise You Also Should Be Glad And Rejoice With Me—It was one thing for Paul to be glad to make the sacrifice of his life for the Philippians; it was quite another thing for them to be glad to have him do it. Still, it was necessary that they understand and accept this as the will of God. Paul wanted them to learn to “rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4), even for the things that might initially cause their hearts to break.

Timothy And Epaphroditus (2:19-30)

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. 20 I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare. 21 They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But Timothy’s worth you know, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself shall come also.

25 Titus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy; and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete your service to me.

V. 19 I Hope In The Lord Jesus To Send Timothy – Another major reason for sending this letter to Philippi was to prepare them for the coming of Timothy. Paul was not certain what the future held for him (v. 23). It was his expectation to be acquitted, to send Timothy with up-to-the-minute news, and to journey to Philippi himself shortly afterwards (v. 24).

So That I May Be Cheered By News Of You – Paul also anticipated the possibility that Timothy would have enough time to return from Philippi before Paul’s release.

V. 20 I Have No One Like Him, Who Will Be Genuinely Anxious For Your Welfare – Like Paul,

Timothy had the mind of Christ, the attitude of self-sacrificing servanthood. Paul had no one “equal-souled” to Timothy, for Timothy’s concern for the Philippians could even be called “anxiety.” (This strong word for concerned involvement is the same word Jesus forbade in reference to material concerns in Matt. 6:34.)

V. 21 They All Look After Their Own Interests, Not Those Of Jesus Christ – Is this a blanket condemnation of all Paul’s other co-workers? Does this describe Luke, Titus, and Mark? Perhaps Paul referred only to the few co-workers presently available for appointment to this mission. Or perhaps Paul simply meant that in comparison with Timothy, all others were made to look selfish by contrast. At any rate, it is not our task to evaluate Paul’s assistants, but to learn to be self-sacrificing servants who care for the interests of others (2:4).

V. 22 But Timothy’s Worth You Know – Timothy’s “worth” was the approvedness which comes from having been tested in the fire and found genuine. (See notes on 1:10) The same word is used by Paul in Rom. 5:4 to describe the “character” which is produced by enduring suffering.

How As A Son With A Father He Has Served With Me – The Philippians had observed Timothy’s service during both the second (Acts 16:3) and third (Acts 18:5) missionary journeys. They could understand quite well the closeness in the relationship between Paul and his “genuine child in the faith” (I Tim. 1:2).

V. 23 I Hope Therefore To Send Him Just As Soon As I See How It Will Go With Me – Paul seems to have expected a decision to be reached shortly. While he expressed some uncertainty about the future here, it should be noted that his uncertainty is not in the Lord, but in Nero.

V. 24 And I Trust In The Lord – Paul’s confidence was also expressed with the same Greek word in 1:6 and 25. Nero was unstable, but the Lord was not!

Shortly I Myself Shall Come Also – Was Paul in fact released from this imprisonment in Rome? Not only does church history affirm this, but it is required in order to fit the epistles to Timothy and Titus into the chronology of Paul’s life. The traditional view is no doubt correct that following his release, Paul wrote I Timothy and Titus; and during his later imprisonment, he wrote II Timothy.

V. 25 I Have Thought It Necessary To Send To You Epaphroditus – Paul wanted to make it clear that Epaphroditus was returning home to Philippi by Paul’s own decision, not as a matter of Epaphroditus’ own pleasure or as the result of his personal failure.

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

My Brother And Fellow Soldier, And Your Messenger And Minister To My Need – Epaphroditus had been sent from Philippi to bring gifts to Paul (4:18) and to be Paul’s personal assistant during his imprisonment. This long and impressive array of titles was given as a precaution against anyone thinking that Epaphroditus had failed.

V. 26 For He Has Been Longing For You All – The word used here for “longing” is the same word Paul used in 1:8 to express how he himself “yearned” for these same brethren.

And Has Been Distressed Because You Heard That He Was Ill – This shows the genuineness of the servant’s heart. Even in desperate sickness, the main concern of Epaphroditus was that his brethren back home would be worried.

V. 27 Indeed He was Ill, Near To Death – The Philippians had heard correctly about his illness. He was so sick, he very nearly died (v. 30).

But God Had Mercy On Him – Epaphroditus’ recovery was not viewed as a process of nature, but as an act of God.

On Me Also, Lest I Should Have Sorrow Upon Sorrow – Paul felt sorrow first of all because by coming to Rome, Epaphroditus had become sick. Paul would have felt much additional sorrow if this generous service had also led to Epaphroditus’ death.

V. 28 I Am The More Eager To Send Him, Therefore, That You May Rejoice – The Philippians’ joy had been threatened by Epaphroditus’ sickness. His return would confirm to them that in all things they could depend upon the Lord and rejoice (4:4).

V. 29 So Receive Him In The Lord With All Joy – This repetition perhaps indicates that Paul was afraid they might not receive Epaphroditus well. It would have been easy for them to have reservations about him, thinking of him as a “drop-out.”

And Honor Such Men – The principle involved here goes beyond Epaphroditus and the first century. Too many times veteran missionaries and preachers have returned home with broken health and depleted finances, only to find indifference to their plight.

V. 30 For He Nearly Died For The Work Of Christ – Like Paul and Timothy, Epaphroditus had the mind of Christ, the attitude of self-sacrificing servanthood. He was willing to lay down his life, if necessary, for the cause of Christ.

Risking His Life – The word for “risking” was the secular term for gambling. He “took a chance” and laid his life on the line for Jesus.

This same word was later used to name the “Parabolani,” a brotherhood of “riskers” who voluntarily cared for the sick when no one else dared to come near.

To Complete Your Service To Me – None too subtly, Paul reminded the Philippians that they owed a lot to Epaphroditus. He had “filled in” for their “lacking” in service to Paul. Those who had not gone had no room to criticize the one who had.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. In what sense do we work out our own salvation? Can salvation be earned?
2. What extremes will result if either verse 12 or 13 is isolated from its context?
3. In what three respects is the Christian’s life to pass inspection? (See verse 15)
4. How could Paul have “run in vain”?
5. What is a libation? In what way could Paul liken his own life to a libation?
6. What do you know about Timothy? What did the Philippians know about him?
7. Were all Paul’s other co-workers selfish?
8. Why did Paul build up Epaphroditus so much?
9. What lesson must the church learn today about men like Epaphroditus?

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

10. What vivid imagery is behind the phrase “risking his life”?

11. How were the words “without blemish” used in reference to animals sacrificed to God in the Old Testament? What does this indicate about the need for purity in the lives of Christians?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does the verb “work out” mean in verse 12?

12. Explain the meanings of the words “crooked” and “perverse” in verse 15.

2. Explain what is significant about the verb “work out” being a present imperative.

13. What judgment upon sinful living is found in Deut. 32:5?

3. List 3 possible errors, in understanding salvation, that are corrected by Paul’s words, “work out your own salvation.”

14. What is the Greek term for “lights”? In what sense are Christians “lights in the world”?

4. Explain the paradox surrounding the word “fear” in the New Testament.

15. In verse 16, what are two ways that the Greek word for “holding fast” may be understood?

5. What is the proper way to understand the word “fear” in verse 12?

16. In what way should a Christian “hold fast” and “hold forth” the Gospel?

6. What role should “fear and trembling” have in following Paul’s words, “work out your own salvation”?

17. Explain the meaning of the word “libation” in verse 17.

7. Why is it important to always understand verse 12 (“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”) in the context of verse 13 (“for God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure)?

18. What is a literal translation of “upon the sacrificial offering of your faith”?

19. Today, would Paul liken your faith as “a sacrifice offered in priestly service at the temple?” Why or why not?

8. Why is it also important to understand verse 13 in the context of verse 12?

20. What major reason, for writing Philippians, is expressed in verse 19?

9. “Verses twelve and thirteen, taken together, provide a remarkable _____. They show the beautiful _____ of _____ and _____ in the plan of _____.”

21. What is the connection between the word “anxious” (in verse 15) and Matt. 6:34?

22. What is the connection between the word “worth” (in verse 22) and Romans 5:4?

10. Summarize William Barclay’s insight on the words blameless, innocent and without blemish.

23. Name the missionary journeys in which Timothy faithfully served with Paul.

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

24. Was Paul ever released from this imprisonment in Rome? Explain your answer.
25. When did Paul write I & II Timothy and Titus?
26. How does Paul describe Epaphroditus in verse 25?
27. What does Paul share about the illness of Epaphroditus?
28. What lessons can be learned from the faithful, self-sacrificing servanthood of Epaphroditus?
29. What is the meaning of the word “risking” in verse 30?
30. Who were the “Parabolani”?
31. What is the most important lesson that you have learned this section of study, and will it change your life in any way?

Lesson Five (3:1-21)

No Confidence In The Flesh (3:1-11)

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. 3 For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. 4 Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, 6 as to zeal a persecutor of the church, and to righteousness under the law blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ 9

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

V. 1 Finally, My Brethren, Rejoice In The Lord

– In Paul’s mind, this was a fitting conclusion for all that preceded:

- 1:13 I am in prison
- 1:20 I may even die
- 1:29 You will struggle and suffer
- 2:7 Christ emptied himself and died
- 2:17 I am being poured out
- 2:30 Epaphroditus nearly died

So rejoice!

To Write The Same Things To You – In a previous personal note to the Philippians, or perhaps when he was there in person, Paul had warned them against the Judaizers. Now he would do it again.

Not Irksome To Me, And Is Safe For You – This was not “something causing fear or reluctance” for Paul, and it would work toward the “security” of the Philippians.

V. 2 Look Out For The Dogs – This was a term of supreme contempt for the Judaizers. Under the Levitical law, dogs were unclean animals. They were dirty scavengers like jackals and hyenas.

Look Out For The Evil-workers – This describes the same group of Judaizers, becoming more specific in its description.

Look Out For Those Who Mutilate The Flesh – The Judaizers insisted that faith in Christ was not enough. One must also earn God’s favor by keeping certain Old Testament laws, such as circumcision. Thus seeking to justify themselves by their own works, they were severed from Christ and fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4).

In this verse, Paul changed the regular word for circumcision (“around-cut”) to the word for mutilation (“down-cut”). This was to show that the ritual of circumcision was no longer a means of obtaining God’s favor. It did not secure righteousness; it merely hacked off some flesh.

V. 3 For We Are The True Circumcision – Christians are the covenant people of God. They are the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Rom. 9:6-8, 25-26), circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands (Col. 2:11). God’s children are determined not by coincidence of physical ancestry, but by these factors:

They worship God in spirit (John 4:23)

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

They glory in Christ Jesus (Gal. 6:14)

They put no confidence in the flesh

V. 4 Though I Myself Have Reason For Confidence In The Flesh Also – Paul did not want anyone to cry, “Sour grapes!” He was not opposing Jewish legal righteousness just because he had never been able to obtain it. Quite the opposite was true—he had it all, but found it worthless.

If Any Other Man Thinks He Has Reason – Paul welcomed a contest of confidence with the Judaizers. He knew that such a comparison would demonstrate two things: he himself had more reason to boast than any Judaizer; and since all his self-righteousness was worthless, theirs was worth even less.

I Have More – Paul’s reasons for confidence in the flesh can be summarized as follows:

Advantages by Birth:

1. Circumcised on the eighth day
2. Of the people of Israel
3. Of the tribe of Benjamin
4. A Hebrew born of Hebrews

Advantages by Personal Attainment:

5. As to the law, a Pharisee
6. As to zeal, a persecutor of the church
7. As to legal righteousness, blameless

V. 5 Circumcised On The Eighth Day – The law required that the male baby be circumcised when eight days old (Lev. 12:3; Luke 1:59). It is probably that the local Judaizers were born as Gentiles, “Johnny-come-lately” on the circumcision scene.

Of The People Of Israel – Not just a descendant of Abraham (as were also the Ishmaelites) or of Isaac (as were the Edomites), Paul was a true Jew—a descendant of Jacob.

Of The Tribe Of Benjamin – Benjamin was an honored tribe among the people of Israel. It was the tribe of the first king (I Sam. 10:20); it remained loyal to Jerusalem under Rehoboam (I Kg. 12:21); and it helped rebuild Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 4:1).

A Hebrew Born Of Hebrews – Paul was the Hebrew-speaking child of Hebrew-speaking parents.

As To The Law A Pharisee – Paul and his parents (Acts 23:6) were members of the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (Acts 26:5). The Pharisees faithfully observed the most minute detail of the law, scrupulously tithing even their garden spices (Matt. 23:23).

V. 6 As To Zeal A Persecutor Of The Church – Paul was not claiming perfect sinlessness. Rather, he was affirming perfect adherence to the external standards of legalistic righteousness. Every tithe, every feast, every sacrifice—all had been properly observed by the young Pharisee.

V. 7 But Whatever Gain I Had, I Counted As Loss – When Paul added up his virtues, he made a surprising discovery. The grand total was not just a small figure, or even just a zero, but a minus! The more he had worked to save himself, the farther he put himself from God.

It should be noted that Paul did not say that he decided to give up a number of valuable things to gain Christ. He said that he finally realized that all his “gain” was really “loss”!

V. 8 Because Of The Surpassing Worth Of Knowing Christ Jesus My Lord – Everything became “loss” in comparison with the excellency of knowing Christ. Furthermore, “knowing” Christ involved more than mere mental acquaintance. The word means “to have an intimate personal experience” with someone. To know Jesus is to be changed by him. To know Jesus is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3).

For His Sake I Have Suffered The Loss Of All Things, And Count Them As Refuse – Paul gave up nothing of value in order to gain Christ. It was only “refuse,” a word for excrement or garbage. The closest modern equivalent is “sewage.”

Paul’s loss was only sewage; his gain was the Son of God.

V. 9 Not Having A Righteousness Of My Own, Based On Law – As Paul made so plain in Romans 3:21-4:25 and Gal. 2:16-5:6, man is not justified by works of law. He cannot save himself. Neither can he combine his own merit with the ransom price paid on the cross, trying to “help” Jesus win salvation. Paul’s own righteousness was like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), and he was glad to take it off and throw it away.

That Which Is Through Faith In Christ – The only righteousness recognized by God is that which comes through faith in Christ. When Paul committed himself to Jesus, trusting in his death on the cross for justification, he put on a new nature—he put on Christ! (Gal. 3:27)

V. 10 That I May Know Him And The Power Of His Resurrection – Again the word for “know” means intimate personal involvement (v. 8). This participation in Christ would empower Paul with the same mighty strength which raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 1:18-20).

Share His Sufferings, Becoming Like Him In His Death – If Paul was to experience all that is Jesus, he had to have the same willingness to suffer. If Paul should ultimately suffer a martyr’s death, he would count it a privilege (1:29).

V. 11 That If Possible I May Attain The Resurrection From The Dead – Paul did not say this to

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

express any lack of assurance in his own salvation. Rather, it is a humble statement of complete dependence upon God. It represents the complete and final rejection of all confidence in the flesh (v. 4-7).

Press On Toward The Goal (3:12-21)

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

17 Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is their destruction, their god is the belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

V. 12 Not That I Have Already Obtained – In contrast to his former life of confidence in the flesh, now Paul exhibits complete humility.

But I Press On – Jesus had laid hold on Paul with a goal in mind for him, so now Paul was engaged in an all-out “pursuit” of that goal. To “press on” meant to “chase or pursue.”

V. 13 Brethren, I Do Not Consider That I Have Made It My Own – As if in penance for even having listed his one-time virtues, Paul again humbly renounces any self-attainment.

But One Thing I Do – The emphasis is on the word “one.” Paul had a single-minded dedication to this purpose.

Forgetting What Lies Behind And Straining Forward To What Lies Ahead – The picture is of a runner in a race. He may have made some serious mistakes in the early stages of the race, but he cannot dwell on that now. Instead, he “stretches out ahead” as he sees the finish line approaching.

V. 14 I Press On Toward The Goal – The goal is the “mark or target which one sets his sight on.” Paul fixed his vision on this mark and pressed on, “pursuing” it.

For The Prize Of The Upward Call Of God In Christ Jesus – He who reaches the “goal” will win the “prize.” In this case, the prize is an eternal one (I Cor. 9:24-27), the crown of righteousness (II Tim. 4:7-8).

V. 15 Let Those Of Us Who Are Mature Be Thus Minded – The word “mature” (KJV “perfect”) means “full-grown, complete, adult.” All those among the Philippians who had reached this maturity of faith were encouraged to be “thus minded,” to have the attitude or mind-set which pressed on toward the goal. (This is the same word as “have this mind” in 2:2 and 2:5.)

If In Anything You Are Otherwise Minded, God Will Reveal That Also To You – Anyone who didn’t see it this way should expect to get straightened out by God at some future time. How would God reveal it to them? By direct revelation? By further apostolic or prophetic teaching? By a rebuke on judgment day? Paul does not say.

V. 16 Only Let Us Hold True To What We Have Attained – Even though we have not yet attained all things, we have attained some things. Therefore, we must hold true (“stay in line with”) those things we have attained. In “forgetting what lies behind” (v. 13), we must not abandon such progress as we have made. We must forget our failures and preserve our successes.

V. 17 Brethren, Join In Imitating Me – Without any boasting or undue pride, Paul could point to himself as an example of Christian behavior (4:9). He was not guilty of the kind of inconsistency which says, “Do as I say, not as I do.” The secret to this kind of leadership by example is found in I Cor. 11:1, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

And Mark Those Who So Live As You Have An Example In Us – Paul did not consider his Christian life to be unparalleled. To the contrary, he knew there were many who followed the same example (“pattern”). He urged the Philippians to mark (“set their sight on”) such people and follow their example as well.

V. 18 For Many, Of Whom I Have Often Told You And Now Tell You Even With Tears – Paul was keenly aware that many people did not live exemplary lives. He did not brush this off as inevitable, but was moved to tears at their loss.

Live As Enemies Of The Cross Of Christ – Who were these enemies of the cross? The Judaizers? The heathen Gentiles? In the context of these verses (especially as a contrast to verse 17), these enemies were probably people who had once made a profession of faith in Christ, but now had fallen back into sensuality and self-indulgence. Such people are actually the worst enemies Christianity has.

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

V. 19 Their End Is Destruction – God is not mocked. Such people will reap their just reward—eternal destruction in hell. (See Rom 6:21, II Cor. 11:15; Heb. 6:8.)

Their God Is The Belly – Followers of the cross learn to deny, but the enemies of the cross live for self-gratification. Their lives are controlled by the lusts of the flesh. The word for “belly” includes much more than just the appetite for food and drink. All physical, sensual appetites are included.

Their Glory In Their Shame – Such people not only live debased lives, they even take perverse pride in their wickedness. While they think they enjoy the freedom of permissiveness, they are actually in bondage to their lusts.

With Minds Set On Earthly Things – Such people do not have the mind of Christ. Whether or not they wallow in the filth of the most extreme sins, they have set their minds (see 2:2, 2:5, 3:15) on earthly things—and this is equally damnable! The Christian must set his mind on the things above (Col. 3:2).

V. 20 But Our Commonwealth Is In Heaven – Just as the Philippians were citizens of far away Rome, so the Christians are citizens of the “homeland” in heaven. Christians do not take an excessive interest in earthly affairs (“with minds set on earthly things”), because this is not their real home.

From It We Await A Savior, The Lord Jesus Christ – The Christian’s eyes are fixed on heaven. Almost as people held captive in a foreign land, they await their Deliverer. (See I Thess. 1:9-10; 4:16-17.)

V. 21 Who Will Change Our Lowly Body To Be Like His Glorious Body – The Savior will rescue them from their earthly captivity and will change (“transform”) their lowly bodies of flesh. The corruptible will become incorruptible (I Cor. 15:53) and the Christian will appear with Jesus in glory (Col. 3:4). Then the Christian’s body will be like (“conformed to”) the glorious body of Christ. (See also I John 3:2.)

By The Power Which Enables Him Even To Subject All Things To Himself – The One who has the “effective, working power” to subject all the universe to his control will use that power to make our bodies changed and eternal.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Paul call certain people “dogs, evil workers, those who mutilate the flesh”?

2. Who are the true covenant people of God? Do they have a mark of circumcision?
3. Why did Paul list all his former virtues?
4. What is “a Hebrew born of Hebrews”?
5. How could Paul claim to have been blameless? Didn’t he also call himself the “chief of sinners” (I Tim. 1:15)?
6. Did Paul have to give up a lot in order to gain Christ?
7. What is the difference between righteousness based on law and the righteousness that depends on faith?
8. How is the Christian life like a race?
9. Who were the “enemies of the cross”? Describe them.
10. Will we have bodies in heaven? Will our bodies be like the body of Jesus after the resurrection?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain the meaning of the term “dogs” in verse 2
2. “The _____ insisted that _____ in Christ was not enough. One must also _____ God’s _____ by keeping certain _____ laws, such as _____.”

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

3. What is significant about Paul changing the regular word for “circumcision” to the word for “mutilation”?
4. List 3 factors which determine if one is a true child of God.
5. List 7 reasons why Paul could have put confidence in the flesh.
6. According to Leviticus 12:3, when was a male baby to be circumcised?
7. Paul was a direct descendant from Israel’s tribe of _____. What made this particular tribe so “honored” in the Old Testament?
8. Summarize the lawkeeping habits of the Pharisees.
9. What did Paul mean by the words, “as to righteousness under the law blameless”?
10. Explain Paul’s words, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss.”
11. What is the meaning of “knowing” in verse 8?
12. Explain the meaning of “refuse” in verse 8.
13. “Man is not _____ by works of law. He cannot _____ himself. Neither can he _____ his own _____ with the _____ price paid on the cross, trying to ‘help’ Jesus _____ salvation. Paul’s own _____ was like _____, and he was glad to take it off and _____.”
14. What is the only righteousness that is recognized by God?
15. Explain the meaning of the “know” and “the power of His resurrection” in verse 10.
16. Is the “power of Christ’s resurrection” available to Christians today? See Eph. 1:18-20.
17. What does it mean to “share in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death”?
18. Is Paul questioning the assurance of his salvation in verse 11? If not, then what does he mean?
19. What is the meaning of the term “press on” in verse 12?
20. What picture is behind Paul’s words “Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead”?
21. Why is it so important for a Christian to forget past mistakes and focus upon “straining forward to what lies ahead”?
22. “In ‘forgetting what lies behind’ (v. 13) we must not _____ such _____ as we have made. We must _____ our _____ and _____ our _____.”
23. What did Paul mean when he wrote, “mark those who so live as you have an example in us”?
24. Who were the “enemies of the cross of Christ” in verse 18?
25. What is meant by the word “belly” in verse 19?
26. What do 1 Cor. 15:53, Col. 3:4, and 1 John 3:2 teach about a Christian’s future “transformed” body?
27. What is the most significant lesson your have learned from this study, and how will this improve your relationship with Jesus?

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

Lesson Six (4:1-23)

Rejoice In The Lord (4:1-9)

1 Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say Rejoice. 5 Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. 6 Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.

V. 1 Therefore, My Brethren – Because they have a home in heaven and because they were soon to be rescued by their Savior, the Philippians were to stand fast.

Whom I Love And Long For – As in 1:8, Paul “yearned” for these special brethren who were so dear to his heart.

My Joy And Crown – The word for “crown” is not the royal diadem, but the woven crown or wreath placed on the head of the winner of an athletic contest. If the Philippians held fast to the gospel (2:16) and stood firm in the Lord, then Paul had his victory. He had not run in vain.

Stand Firm Thus In The Lord, My Beloved – The present tense of this imperative verb indicates that standing firm must be a continuing action. It was not a single battle the Philippians faced, but a war of attrition. They had to “stand firm and keep on standing firm.”

V. 2 I Entreat Euodia And I Entreat Syntyche – These are feminine names, evidently referring to two of the women in the Philippian church. If Paul had not cared so much for these people, he might well have “minded his own business.” But his love for them made it his business!

To Agree In The Lord – Literally “to set the minds on the same thing” as in 2:2. While one can only speculate as to the source or nature of their squabble, the remedy for it is plain. They must both set their minds on the same thing in the Lord. They must have the mind of Christ and deny self. Perhaps they could not ever agree on everything, but they could agree to love one another.

V. 3 And I Ask You Also, True Yokefellow, Help These Women – Paul also dared to involve another person in this dispute. Various of Paul’s co-workers have been suggested as the “yokefellow,” but it seems likely that “yokefellow” (Gk. *Syzygus*) was simply the person’s name. Thus, “genuine yokefellow” would mean “Syzygus, rightly so named.”

For They Have Labored Side By Side With Me In The Gospel – These women labored (“contended together”) with Paul, and their work is described by the same word used in 1:27. From the very first day in Philippi, Paul and his team were joined by devout women in the team effort of spreading the gospel.

Together With Clement And The Rest Of My Fellow Workers, Whose Names Are In The Book Of Life – Clement and the others are unknown to us, but they are well known to God. Their names are recorded in heaven where they would dwell with God (Luke 10:20; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 21:27).

V. 4 Rejoice In The Lord Always; Again I Will Say Rejoice – This is the keynote of the epistle. The words “joy” and “rejoice” are used eighteen times. Despite imprisonment or suffering, the command is the same: “Rejoice”! Even when it is not possible to rejoice in the situation, it is still possible to rejoice in the Lord . . . always!

V. 5 Let All Men Know Your Forbearance – Forbearance is the willingness to temper legal justice with mercy, to show gentle consideration. One very effective witness to non-Christians is the kind of patience and forbearance that comes as a fruit of the Spirit.

The Lord Is At Hand – The Lord is “near” in two ways. His presence is always with us and his second coming is only a trumpet blast away. Either of these facts should cause us to be more forbearing toward people.

V. 6 Have No Anxiety About Anything – “Worry is an insult to God.” Christians must learn to turn over their cares and anxieties to God. They must not “be anxious for the morrow” (Matt. 6:34) but must trust God for their daily needs. (Note the use of “anxious” in a positive way in 2:20.)

But In Everything By Prayer And Supplication With Thanksgiving Let Your Requests Be Made

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

Known To God —A talk with God will relieve anxiety. Four different words are used here to describe the kind of communication we make to God. “Prayer” is the general word for a message addressed to God.

“Supplication” is a more specific word for a petition or entreaty, often in behalf of someone else. It beseeches God to do something. “Thanksgiving” is gratitude expressed to God for his goodness and grace. In this sense, thanksgiving can be offered “in everything,” no matter how tragic the circumstances. “Requests” are the specific things we desire of God.

V. 7 And The Peace Of God, Which Passes All Understanding – Notice how the peace of God in this verse is sandwiched between right praying (v. 6) and right thinking (v. 8). This peace of God surpasses and “rises above” all human thought. Whenever we are distraught and cannot think of any possible solution, we must turn the matter over to God.

Will Keep Your Hearts And Your Minds In Christ Jesus – “Keep” is a military word meaning “to stand guard over.” Our security and peace of mind does not depend upon our own watchfulness, but on the sovereign providence of God.

The “hearts” and “minds” should not be understood as totally separate parts of a man, such as “emotion” and “intelligence.” Throughout the scriptures, “heart” includes willing, feeling, and thinking. It is the center of man’s being.

V. 8 Finally, Brethren, Whatever Is True – Notice that the right thinking of this verse is sandwiched between the “peace of God” in verse seven and the “God of peace” in verse nine.

Things that are “true” conform to reality. The ultimate norm of truth is the Lord himself (John 14:6) and his Word (John 17:17).

Whatever Is Honorable – This means things that are noble, dignified, serious, and worthy of reverence. They have the dignity which grows out of moral excellence.

Whatever Is Just – Things that are right, fair, and in accordance with God’s commandments are “just.”

Whatever Is Pure – This moral purity is undefiled by contamination with sin. This word was frequently used to describe the “chastity” of a virgin.

Whatever Is Lovely – The Christian’s thoughts are not all stern and sober. His thoughts also include what is “attractive and pleasing” and whatever “calls forth love.”

Whatever Is Gracious – Literally, “well-sounding.” This includes things that are attractive, appealing, and praise-worthy. This word also softens the serious tone of the first words in this series.

If There Is Any Excellence – This is the comprehensive classical Greek word for “virtue.” It points to what is brave, beautiful, and morally upright. This kind of virtue is held in honor by all men.

If There Is Anything Worthy Of Praise – Simply, that which is approved and praiseworthy.

Think About These Things – The Greek word for “think” can be understood in two different ways, both of which are applicable here. First, it means to compute the worth of. Christians should evaluate these virtues and choose them instead of evil. Second, it means to let the mind dwell on. This kind of right thinking promotes peace of mind.

V. 9 What You Have Learned And Received And Heard And Seen In Me, Do – The first two words point to Paul’s teaching and the other two point to his personal example (as in 3:17).

And The God Of Peace Will Be With You – Real inner peace does not come from mystical meditation, but from God, the source and giver of peace.

Thank You For The Gifts (4:10-23)

10 I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me; you were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. 13 I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving except you only; 16 for even in Thessalonica you sent me to help once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift; but I seek the fruit which increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more; I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.

23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

V. 10 I Rejoice In The Lord Greatly That Now At Length You Have Revived Your Concern For Me

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

– After an indefinite interval of delay, the Philippians had “caused their concern to bloom again,” sending gifts to Paul in Rome. The emphasis is not on the delay, but on rejoicing in the present concern.

You Were Indeed Concerned For Me, But You Had No Opportunity – Paul used the imperfect tense, saying in effect, “You were caring all along.” He was careful to remove any possible tone of reproach for the tardiness of their support.

V. 11 Not That I Complain Of Want – Paul did not “speak according to his lack.” He was in want, but that was not what prompted these words.

For I Have Learned, In Whatever State I Am, To Be Content –The word “content” was a popular word with Stoic philosophers to describe the “self-sufficient” man. He was totally independent of everybody and everything, and nothing could affect him. It is clear, however, that Paul was not “self-sufficient” but “God-sufficient” (v. 6, 13, 19).

V. 12 I Know How To Be Abased, And I Know How To Abound – To be “abased” meant to experience humiliation and poverty. To “abound meant to have an over-flowing abundance and have all one’s needs supplied. Paul could face deprivation without complaint and could face affluence without over-exultation.

I Have Learned The Secret Of Facing Plenty And Hunger, Abundance And Want – Whether stuffed or starving, Paul was not unduly concerned, for his belly was not his god (3:19). Paul had come to grips with the fact that either too much or too little material wealth can often turn a man against God.

“Give me neither poverty nor riches . . . lest I be full and deny Thee and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God.” (Proverbs 30:8, 9)

V. 13 I Can Do All Things In Him Who Strengthens Me – In context, this means the ability to face any circumstance without despair. Paul could not always get food (II Cor. 11:27), but he could face hunger victoriously. He could not always escape his enemies, but he could face prison triumphantly. He could not always get the financial support he needed, but he could face poverty and win.

Who was the One who strengthened Paul? After the sixth century, most manuscripts added the word “Christ.” In other places in this epistle, the one who supplies strength is:

| <u>Christ</u> | <u>(either)</u> | <u>God</u> |
|---------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1:11 | 1:6 | 2:13 |
| 1:19 | 1:10 | 4:6 |
| 1:21 | | 4:9 |
| 3:21 | | 4:19 |

V. 14 Yet It Was Kind Of You To Share My Trouble – Literally, “you did nobly, being partners (as in 1:7) in my affliction.”

V. 15 In The Beginning Of The Gospel, When I Left Macedonia – See notes on 1:5, 6.

No Church Entered Into Partnership With Me In Giving And Receiving Except You Only – Paul was glad to make the gospel available free of charge (I Cor. 9:6-18) wherever he preached. Only the church in Philippi was allowed to support Paul in a continuing “partnership” in the gospel.

V. 16 Even In Thessalonica You Sent Me Help – Thessalonica was another city of Macedonia, and was Paul’s next stop after Philippi on the second missionary journey (Acts 17:1).

V. 17 Not That I Seek The Gift – As in verse 11, Paul was eager to get finances into the proper perspective.

I Seek The Fruit Which Increases To Your Credit – It was not that Paul—much less the Lord—needed their money. They needed to experience the blessing of giving. By investing in evangelism, they were putting money in their own account (thus, “to your credit”) in heaven. (See Matt. 6:20.)

V. 18 I Have Received Full Payment – These words were the first century equivalent of “paid in full.” Paul had received full payment—and more! He considered himself overpaid!

A Fragrant Offering, A Sacrifice Acceptable And Pleasing To God –Just as Paul saw his own ministry as a sacrifice, he also saw the financial support of the Philippians as a sacrifice. Strong imagery from the Old Testament temple sacrifices is present here.

V. 19 And My God Will Supply Every Need Of Yours According To His Riches In Glory In Christ Jesus – The extent to which God is prepared to provide our needs is inexhaustible. The only limitation lies in the word “need.” God has not promised to supply everything we may think we want.

V. 20 To Our God And Father Be Glory For Ever And Ever – All the activity of the kingdom—even the adoration of the Son—must resound to the glory of the Father (1:11; 2:11).

Amen – From the Aramaic language, meaning “it is firm, so be it.”

V. 21 Greet Every Saint In Christ Jesus – As at the beginning (1:1), all God’s “set-apart” people are included.

V. 22 All The Saints Greet You, Especially Those Of Caesar's Household – Included among the ranks of the Christians in Rome were members of Caesar’s household! This did not necessarily mean his

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

own family, but included all those associated with the imperial palace: slaves, freedmen, household servants, and others. Paul was in chains, but the gospel was not! (See 1:12-14.)

V. 23 The Grace Of The Lord Jesus Christ Be With Your Spirit – As always, Paul closed with a note of grace (1:2).

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of crown was Paul talking about in verse one? How was this connected to the Philippian brethren?
2. Why did Paul intrude into a private squabble between two women in Philippi?
3. How is it possible to rejoice always? Isn't there a time to weep and a time to laugh (Eccl. 3:4)?
4. What is forbearance?
5. What is the specific meaning of each of the four words dealing with prayer in verse six?
6. What is the connection between prayer, the peace of God; right thinking, and the God of peace? (See v. 6-9)
7. Which is a greater threat to one's faith: poverty or wealth?

8. If we "can do all things in him who strengthens" us, will we always be healthy, wealthy, and successful? Was Paul?
9. Why did Paul allow the Philippians to give him money when he allowed no other church to do so?
10. How could the gospel have reached inside the very household of Caesar?
11. What have you learned from the study of Philippians? In what specific ways will this study change the way you think and the way you live?

A.B.A. REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the meaning of the word "crown" in verse 1?
2. What is indicated by the "present tense" of the imperative verb "stand firm" in verse 1?
3. Are "Euodia" and "Syntyche" masculine or feminine names? Who are these people?
4. What was the remedy for the squabble between Euodia and Syntyche?
5. Explain the meaning of "yokefellow" and "Syzygus."
6. Summarize what Rev. 3:5, 13:8, and 21:27 teach about the "book of life."
7. What is "forbearance"?

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

8. List 2 ways in which the Lord is “near.”
9. “_____ is an _____ to God. Christians must learn to turn over their _____ and _____ to God.”
10. Provide a brief definition of the following words: prayer, supplication, thanksgiving, and requests.
11. Define the word “keep” in verse 7.
12. What is the proper understanding of the words “hearts” and “minds” in verse 7?
13. “Things that are ‘_____’ conform to reality. The ultimate norm of _____ is the _____ and _____.”
14. What is meant by “whatever is honorable”?
15. What is the meaning of “whatever is just”?
16. Define “whatever is pure.”
17. How does this lesson describe “whatever is lovely”?
18. Provide a definition of “whatever is gracious.”
19. Explain “if there is any excellence.”
20. Explain 2 ways in which the Greek word for “think” can be understood.
21. What are some things that others have learned, received, heard, or seen in you that you would like them to practice in their own lives?
22. What are some things that others have learned, received, heard, or seen in you that you do not want to become incorporated into their lives? What steps will you take to overcome these areas in your own life?
23. How did Stoic philosophers use the word “content”?
24. Explain these words: “Paul was not ‘self-sufficient’ but ‘God-sufficient.’” How can Christians become more “God-sufficient”?
25. What does it mean to be “abased”?
26. Explain the teaching of Proverbs 30:8-9.
27. In its proper context, what is the meaning of Phil. 4:13?
28. How many churches entered into a continuing partnership to support the work of Paul?
29. “_____ was another city of _____, and was Paul’s next stop after Philippi on the _____ missionary journey.”

SIX LESSONS ON PHILIPPIANS

30. What did the words “full payment” mean in the First Century, and what did they mean to Paul?
31. What is significant about the word “need” in verse 19?
32. The word “amen” comes from the _____ language. What does “amen” mean?
33. What is the meaning of “Caesar’s household” in verse 22?
34. Why do you think Paul always closed his letters with a note of grace?
35. What is the most meaningful lesson that you have learned from this section, and how will it change your life and improve your relationship with Jesus?
36. What specific blessings have you gained from this course on Philippians? What can you do to promote the “joy” that Paul felt in his life? Take a moment to ask God to use *your life* to spread the love, joy, peace, and message of Jesus with those around you and lead them into a saving relationship with Christ!

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Lesson Seven

(1:1-20)

Salutation (1:1-2)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

V. 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus By The Will Of God – Unlike the close partnership Paul knew with the Philippians, Paul was known to the people of Colossae only by reputation. Paul was careful to identify himself, then, with the most important fact about himself—he was the Lord’s apostle. The word “apostle” means “one sent forth.” Paul was writing this epistle as the special emissary of Christ, and every indication of this epistle is that the people of Colossae acknowledged Paul as such. (For other historical background on Paul, see comments on Phil. 1:1.)

And Timothy Our Brother – Timothy was with Paul in Rome at the writing of this epistle. Like Philippians, this was written during the time of Paul’s imprisonment (Col. 4:10, 18). There is no indication whether the Colossian Christians knew Timothy personally.

V. 2 To The Saints And Faithful Brethren In Christ – Saints are simply “holy people” who are “set apart” for God’s own ownership and use. The word “faithful” would describe those who are loyal to Christ and believe the Gospel. Paul did not usually use the word “faithful” in addressing his readers. He may have done so here in recognition of the fact that not all people in Colossae were “faithful”—some were guilty of a dangerous new heresy. So it is to the “faithful” among them that this epistle is addressed.

At Colossae – Colossae (pronounced “kah LOSS ee”) was a city of Phrygia in southwest Asia Minor. The main road from Ephesus across Asia Minor to the Euphrates River passed through it. Travel along this road had brought Greek philosophy from the west and mystery religions from the east. In addition, there was a sizeable settlement of Jews who had come from Babylon—not orthodox Jerusalem—in the second century B.C. These diverse elements help to explain the rise of the “Colossian heresy.”

Paul had evangelized this area indirectly (Acts 19:10) during his stay in Ephesus. Paul taught men such as

Epaphras who then carried the gospel back to their own cities (1:7).

The epistle to the Colossians is closely tied to both Ephesians and Philemon. It is tied to Ephesians by having the same person deliver it (Tychicus) and by having a remarkable similarity of contents. Of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 73 are said to have direct parallels in Colossians. It is tied to Philemon because Onesimus accompanied both epistles, Archippus received messages in both, and the same associates (Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke) sent greetings in both. It seems likely that all three epistles were written closely together and delivered at the same time.

Grace To You And Peace From God Our Father – See the comments on this standard Pauline greeting at Phil. 1:2.

Prayer For The Colossians (1:3-14)

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—so among yourselves, from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

9 And so, from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with you, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

V. 3 We Always Thank God, The Father Of Our Lord Jesus Christ, When We Pray For You – No one has the right to go around straightening out people for whom he does not pray. Paul had earned the right to correct their heresy—not just by virtue of his apostleship, but by virtue of his genuine concern and thankfulness for these brethren.

V. 4 Because We Have Heard Of Your Faith In Christ Jesus – Paul has heard of the progress of the gospel

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

among the Colossians from Epaphras, who was now in Rome with him (4:12; Philemon 23). Their “faith” in Christ was not only belief, but also “trust” in him and “loyalty” to him. All this is included in the Greek word for faith.

Epaphras was apparently also Paul’s source of information about the heresy. Paul had heard both good and bad, but he preferred to begin with emphasis on the good.

And Of The Love Which You Have For All The Saints – This word for “love” (*agape*) was used exclusively for the Christian kind of love. It was more than feeling; it was commitment. It never counted the cost, it never calculated the profit. It was the identifying mark of Jesus' disciples (John 13:35).

V. 5 Because Of The Hope Laid Up For You In Heaven – It is the hope of every Christian to join the Lord and dwell with him in heaven’s glory. (See 1:27; 3:4 and Eph. 1:18.)

Of This You Have Heard Before In The Word Of The Truth, The Gospel – This was no new message. There is only one gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), they had heard it; and it is true. Anything different being taught by the teachers of this new heresy (2:8-23) was not true.

V. 6 As Indeed In The Whole World It Is Bearing Fruit And Growing – Paul wanted them to know that the Colossian heresy was a local and inferior doctrine. Those false teachers did not have an exclusive franchise in merchandising truth—the truth was already spreading worldwide! (See 1:23.)

So Among Yourselves, From The Day You Heard And Understood The Grace Of God In Truth – The gospel, as received by them, was the truth. It did not need to be supplemented by the philosophical speculations of the false teachers. Any attempt to improve the gospel would only negate God’s grace.

V. 7 As You Learned It From Epaphras Our Beloved Fellow Servant – Epaphras was originally from Colossae (4:12). When he accepted Christ, he became Paul’s co-worker, soon returning to Colossae with the gospel. Now he was a fellow prisoner (Philemon 23) with Paul in Rome. When Paul called him a fellow “servant” here, he used the word meaning “slave.” (See comments on Phil. 1:1.)

He Is A Faithful Minister Of Christ On Our Behalf – The word “minister” has nothing to do with the modern concept of a minister as a clergyman. It meant simple “one who serves.”

V. 8 And Has Made Known To Us Your Love In The Spirit – Thus Paul had first-hand information from Epaphras about their love (v. 4).

V. 9 We Have Not Ceased To Pray For You – Obviously Paul did not spend every waking moment in prayer just for these people. Rather, he made them a regular and permanent part of his prayer list.

Filled With The Knowledge Of His Will In All Spiritual Wisdom And Understanding – It is not just knowledge of God, but the knowledge of God’s will that the Christian should seek. This knowledge takes two forms: wisdom, the practical application; and understanding, the clear insight into each situation. Both operate under the description “spiritual.”

V. 10 To Lead A Life Worthy Of The Lord, Fully Pleasing To Him – Right knowledge must lead to right behavior. Knowledge is never an end in itself. The purpose of gaining knowledge—and the purpose for which Paul prayed—was that the Colossians might live (“walk”) their lives in such a way as to please God.

The worthy kind of life is identified by a string of participles which follow: bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, being strengthened, and giving thanks.

Bearing Fruit In Every Good Work – To “bear fruit” is to be productive, to accomplish the intended aim. Notice that good works are not the basis of our right standing with God; but the fruit which results from it.

Increasing In The Knowledge Of God – In the first century, there were the beginnings of what emerged in the second century as Gnosticism, the major heresy of the early church. Gnostics (from the Greek *gnosis*, “knowledge”) claimed to have the secret knowledge which alone could give a man access to God. Their teachings were a blend of Greek philosophy, eastern mysticism, Jewish legalism, and a smattering of orthodox Christianity.

It is not possible to determine the extent to which Paul was writing against an early form of this Gnosticism. It is clear, however, that Paul is careful to keep knowledge in proper perspective, and to keep Christ as the source of real knowledge.

V. 11 May You Be Strengthened With All Power, According To His Glorious Might – It is true in both religion and physics that all energy comes from God. Man never creates power; he only learns to harness it. (Compare Eph. 1:18-20; 3:20-21.)

For All Endurance And Patience With Joy – Endurance is the ability to “bear up under” difficult situations. Patience is the “long-tempered” ability to put up with difficult people. While both these virtues were admired by Greek philosophers, Paul added a quality quite foreign to their thinking: with joy!

V. 12 Giving Thanks To The Father, Who Has Qualified Us – Despite the fact that God had “made sufficient” all his children, certain false teachers in Colossae were pronouncing them disqualified (2:18). Let

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

no man attempt to undo, improve, or otherwise change what God had done!

To Share In The Inheritance Of The Saints In Light – Those whom God has qualified will finally join him and live with him in heaven. He who dwells in “unapproachable light” (I Tim. 6:16) will open his eternal tents to his children.

V. 13 He Has Delivered Us From The Dominion Of Darkness – Literally, “rescued us.” The dominion of darkness (Luke 22:53) refers to the present earthly state as opposed to God’s eternal kingdom. We are no longer subject to the “world rulers of this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12), for God has called us “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Pet. 2:9).

And Transferred Us To The Kingdom Of His Beloved Son – When ancient kings won a military victory, they would often carry out a mass deportation of the conquered people. The Old Testament tells how Israel was transferred to Assyria and how Judah was transferred to Babylon. Christians have thus been transferred into Jesus’ kingdom—but not in defeat. They will reign with him! (See II Tim. 2:12.)

V. 14 In Whom We Have Redemption – Redemption means “paying the ransom price.” The debt was our own sin, and the price was Jesus’ blood (Eph. 1:7; I Pet. 1:18-19).

The Forgiveness Of Sins – Sin is the guilty act of “missing the mark.” Forgiveness is the act of “sending away” or dismissing sins, as made possible by the substitutionary death of Christ.

Lord Of Creation And Lord Of The Church (1:15-20)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, 16 for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 He is therefore all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. 19 For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

V. 15 He Is The Image Of The Invisible God – In order to appreciate properly the importance of these verses, it will be necessary to understand something of first century thinking. Many of the ancient philosophers understood the universe in terms of “dualism.” This meant that God = spirit = good, while physical material = evil. The Gnostics later developed this line of thinking with

these results: God is absolutely good and absolutely separate from contact with the blemished universe; Jesus was spiritual and did not possess flesh and blood; man is a good spirit inhabiting an evil body. Either he must free himself from fleshly contamination by seeking knowledge (*gnosis*) and denying all physical desires, or he can turn his body loose to do every base desire, knowing it is only his body—not his spirit—which does the evil.

The heart of the Colossian heresy was a failure to understand who Jesus is, so Paul began here. Jesus is the “making visible” of the invisible God. As the “image” of God, Jesus is not just a feeble copy of the original, but the illumination of God’s very core and essence. While no man had ever seen God (John 1:18), Jesus could say in fullest truth, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The scriptures further state, “He is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). (See John 12:45 and II Cor. 4:4, 6.)

The First-Born Of All Creation – The emphasis of the word “first-born” is supreme rank or authority. While the word originally referred to the fact that the eldest son had been “born first,” it later came to refer to his special rank. This emphasis on rank, not time of birth, may be clearly seen in Ex. 4:22 and Psalm 89:27.

Jesus is never spoken of in the scriptures as “created.” His relationship with the Father is not that of a manufactured object, but that of a begotten Son. The heresy that God first existed alone and later “created” Jesus was taught by Arius in the fourth century and is promoted by Jehovah’s Witnesses today. (Compare Gen. 1:1; John 1:1; and Heb. 13:8.)

V. 16 For In Him All Things Were Created – The Jehovah’s Witnesses have changed their Bible to read “all other things were created,” in order to make room for Jesus as a created thing himself. God’s Word, on the other hand, clearly teaches that all created things were made through the Son, who already existed in the beginning (John 1:1-3).

In Heaven And On Earth, Visible And Invisible – To counter the Colossian heresy that angels should be worshipped (2:18), Paul affirmed that all beings—even angels—were created through and for the Son. Paul even used terminology from current Jewish speculations to refer to whatever ranks of angels there may be: thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities. (See also Col. 2:15; Eph. 3:10, 6:12; and Rom. 3:38.)

V. 17 He is Before All Things – As F. F. Bruce has said, “No matter how far back we may press in our imagination, we can never reach a point of which we may say, with Arius, ‘There was once when He was not.’”

In Him All Things Hold Together – The scriptures clearly teach that Jesus was not only the effective agent

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

through whom the universe was created; he is also the sustaining power that holds it together (Heb. 1:2-3). Contrary to the teaching of ancient dualism, God is very much involved in the physical world—in and through his Son Jesus Christ.

V. 18 He Is The Head Of The Body, The Church – The description of Christ and his church as head and body is not found in Paul’s writings before Ephesians and Colossians. It is a key concept here, allowing the Christian to get a proper perspective of himself and his Lord. The head exercises control and direction; the body obeys and performs the work. The church (*ekklesia*, “called out ones”) is a collective body of believers. There was no provision for a separate and elite group of “knowers of secret knowledge” within the body. (See Col. 2:19.)

He Is The Beginning, The First-Born From The Dead – The “beginning” was a favorite word among philosophers for that origin, source, or first cause from which all things resulted. Jesus was this, and more. He was also raised from the dead, and shall have supreme rank (“first-born”) over all those who pass through death into life everlasting. In all things, Jesus shall be “pre-eminent,” taking first place.

V. 19 For In Him All The Fulness Of God Was Pleased To Dwell – It was the ultimate Gnostic aim to divide the “fulness” of God into many levels, each represented by a rank of angels slightly less divine than the rank above. To forewarn us against any such deception, Paul made it plain: all the fulness was found in Jesus Christ—bodily (2:9).

V. 20 And Through Him To Reconcile To Himself All Things – God’s eternal purpose has always been the reconciliation of men to himself. The avenue of reconciliation for men is not meritorious achievement or secret knowledge, but Christ. He alone is the way to the Father (John 14:6). (See also Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:18-20; and Eph. 2:16.)

Whether On Earth Or In Heaven – No one anywhere, not even the angels, can hope to secure reconciliation to God through any other means.

Making Peace By The Blood Of His Cross – Jesus indeed took on himself a body of flesh and blood; and with this body, he paid the price of sin. He forever excluded Jewish reliance on animal sacrifice; he forever destroyed Gnostic contempt for the flesh. (See Eph. 2:13-17.)

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What was the background of Colossae? Had Paul ever been there? What diverse religious and philosophical elements were present?

2. What two words are always found at the opening of Paul’s epistles? What particular relevance would they have had for the Colossians? (Note 1:12; 2:16, 18.)
3. What did the Colossians have which marked them as real Christians? (V. 4-5)
4. What is known about Epaphras?
5. What is the purpose of knowledge?
6. What constitutes living a life pleasing to the Lord?
7. Can we qualify and disqualify one another in the family of God?
8. What is the relationship of Jesus to God the Father? What is his relationship to the created universe?
9. Is there any provision for an elite body of “super-saints” within the body of Christ? Are there people today who try to promote this kind of division?
10. How was God “in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (II Cor. 5:19)?

Lesson Eight

(1:21 – 2:5)

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Christ In You, The Hope Of Glory (1:21-29)

21 And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has not reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, 23 provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the words of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.

V. 21 And You, Who Once Were Estranged – The word for “estranged” was used to describe what was alienated, separated, and even in medical language for what had been surgically removed. Sin had caused this alienation from God, which is graphically described in Eph. 2:1-3, 11-12.

And Hostile In Mind – The word for “hostile” was the standard word for an “enemy” in the Greek language. Sin had produced separation from God, and separation had produced hostility. Whether consciously or subconsciously, the guilty sinner harbors a suspicious resentment toward God.

Doing Evil Deeds – As it seems plain also in Eph. 2:1-3, this separation and hostility are not God's doing. The sinner himself is guilty of “doing evil deeds,” and this is what separates him from God.

V. 22 He Has Now Reconciled – The work of salvation was initiated by God, not man, while man was still dead in his sins (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:5). The great gulf of separation was crossed by God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Why was Paul reviewing these obvious facts about God's plan of salvation? Answer: He was building the basis for an attack against the teaching of the Colossian heretics. They were teaching salvation by the attainment of special knowledge and the achievement of rigorous self-denial (2:8-23). Paul wanted to remind them that salvation

was a gift of God's grace, not a reward for man's goodness.

In His Body Of Flesh By His Death – Paul's continuing emphasis on blood and death (1:20, 22, 24; 2:9, 12, 14) seems to indicate that the false teachers of Colossae were trying to minimize the truth of the incarnation. Perhaps they were beginning to teach, with the fully-developed Gnostics of the second century, that Jesus could not have really died on the cross. He was actually laughing at the soldiers from the clouds while they crucified a phantom.

Modern theology also tries to preach a “bloodless” Christianity. It remains the true core of the gospel, however, that Jesus historically lived, died, and rose again.

In Order To Present You Holy And Blameless And Irreproachable Before Him – When men lose sight of the truth about God, they also lose sight of the truth about themselves. Even in the midst of outward righteousness (2:16-23), the Colossians still needed a strong exhortation toward right ethical behavior (3:1-4:6). God's purpose in saving them was to make them holy (“set apart”), blameless (“without blemish”), and irreproachable (“not liable to accusation, not able to be charged with fault”).

V. 23 Provided That You Continue In The Faith – God's plan for salvation is dependent upon the continuing cooperation of the saved. They must persevere in their commitment to Christ.

Stable And Steadfast, Not Shifting – Paul wanted the Colossians to be stable (“built on a foundation”), steadfast (“firmly seated”), and not shifting (“moving around from place to place”). Otherwise they would be “tossed by the waves and blown around by the winds” of false doctrine (Eph. 4:14).

From The Hope Of The Gospel Which You Heard – Just as in Gal. 1:9, the Christians were considered competent to judge for themselves the teachings they heard. Is the teaching in line with the gospel as originally preached? If not, it is false. The original gospel message is true.

Which Has Been Preached To Every Creature Under Heaven – Paul again pointed to the test of universality. (See Col. 1:6 and Rom. 1:8.) The teaching of certain Colossian digressives was a local, inferior heresy.

And Of Which I, Paul, Became A Minister – Paul was a “servant” (1:7) of the gospel. Paul was not in charge of the gospel; the gospel was in charge of him.

V. 24 Now I Rejoice In My Sufferings For Your Sake – Mention of the gospel and his own service gave Paul occasion to speak briefly of his own toiling and suffering (1:24 – 2:5). Refer back to Phil. 1:12-30; 2:17-

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

18; 4:4, 11-19 for Paul's attitude toward this imprisonment.

In My Flesh I Complete What Is Lacking In Christ's Afflictions For The Sake Of His Body – What was lacking in Christ's afflictions? Was his atoning death inadequate? What more was needed? Only this: someone had to tell men of Christ's death for them (Rom. 10:14) or—for them, at least—Christ would have died in vain. Christ suffered to pay, Paul suffered to tell.

For The Sake Of His Body, That Is, The Church – Paul could make an easy transition from the Lord's flesh body to his church body. He also saw the church body as continuing in the role of suffering servant, just as the flesh body did. Paul's own part in this suffering was gladly accepted.

V. 25 Of Which I Became A Minister – Just as Paul was a servant of the gospel (v. 23), he was also a “servant” of the church.

According To The Divine Office Which Was Given To Me For You – “Divine office” is an unfortunate translation for the “stewardship of God” which was given to Paul. Just as a trusted servant who is put in charge of a house responsibility. Paul became an entrusted carrier of the gospel. Paul was not magnifying himself or his job responsibility (“office”); the opposite was true. He minimized himself and glorified the Lord.

To Make The Word Of God Fully Known – This was Paul's job responsibility. This was what he did to “complete what was lacking in Christ's afflictions.”

V. 26 The Mystery For Ages And Generations – In the Bible, the word “mystery” does not mean something that will always be difficult to understand. The word simply means a secret—something one would never know until told (I Cor. 2:9). Through all the centuries of time, until the very day at Calvary, no man knew that God would sacrifice his own Son for the sins of the world.

But Now Made Manifest To His Saints – Now the secret has been told; the plan has been exposed. All God's people can now see how God worked from the very beginning of creation to accomplish salvation through his Son.

V. 27 To Them God Chose To Make Known – God kept secret his gospel plan, not even allowing angels to look into it (I Pet. 1:12). Then at the point in history chosen by God (Gal. 4:2-4), he brought his plan out into the open.

How Great Among The Gentiles Are The Riches Of The Glory Of This Mystery – The real beauty of God's plan was that unlike the covenant made with Abraham and his descendants, the gospel plan included the Gentiles! Thus, as Paul said in the next verse, every man is warned and taught and intended to stand before Christ.

Which Is Christ In You, The Hope Of Glory – This is the precious core of the mystery: Jesus died for us to live in us. Our only hope of participating in the glory of God—here or in heaven—is by Christ dwelling in our hearts (Eph. 3:17). As William Temple put it:

“It is not good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it; I can't. And it is no good showing me a life like that of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it; I can't. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me then I could write plays like that. And if the Spirit of Jesus could come and live in me, then I could live a life like that.”

Christ in you is the same as the Holy Spirit. (See John 14:21, 23; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Rom. 8:9).

In the final analysis, the “hope of glory” is the hope of the Christian to join the Lord in heaven and dwell there with him in his glory (Col. 1:5; 3:4; Eph. 1:14).

V. 28 Him We Proclaim, Warning Every Man And Teaching Every Man In All Wisdom – The proclaiming of Christ is done in two stages. The word for “warning” has to do with the will and feelings of a man, and leads toward a commitment of that man's will to Christ. The word for “teaching” has to do with the development and guidance of the intellect. These two words rightly belong together if the man is ever to be presented “complete” in Christ.

That We May Present Every Man Mature In Christ – Notice that Paul has said “every man” three times in this verse. He was not interested in developing an elite group of super-saints, as the Gnostics later tried to do. It was Paul's goal that every convert should “grow up to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

V. 29 For This I Toil – This is a strong word, implying toil to the point of weariness or exhaustion (Phil. 2:16).

Striving With All The Energy Which He Mightily Inspires With Me – “Striving” was a common athletic term for participating in a great contest. The intensity of the word (*agonizomai*) can be seen in the English derivative “agonize.” Paul was not toiling and striving on his own, however. His strength came from God's “energy which was being energized in him with power” (*dynamis*). This same inner strength was available to the Colossians (1:11) and to us (Eph. 3:20-21).

Christ, The Mystery Of God (2:1-5)

I For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, 3 in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with beguiling speech. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

V. 1 For I Want You To Know How Greatly I Strive For You – “The same Greek word for “strive” is used both here and in the preceding verse.) Paul’s whole ministry was devoted to the spiritual progress of all his converts. This also included all the new Christians converted through the agency of his helpers, as in the case of the Colossians. Paul also continued to strive for these people in his prayers (1:9). Perhaps this verse speaks of both his ministry and his prayers.

And For Those At Laodicea – Laodicea was a neighboring city which lay about ten miles to the northwest of Colossae. The city is important in New Testament study because of the mention of “the epistle out of Leodicea” (4:16) and the message given to the church there in Rev. 3:14-22.

And For All Who Have Not Seen My Face – In many nearby cities, such as Hierapolis (4:13), there were Christians who knew Paul only through his assistants. Paul’s toil and prayers were extended in their behalf as well.

V. 2 That Their Hearts May Be Encouraged – To comfort and encourage (*parakaleo*) is especially the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (*parakletos*). There is perhaps a connection between this verse and the phrase “Christ in you, the hope of glory” which was just four verses prior.

As They Are Knit Together In Love – The word for “knit together” originally meant “to cause to stride together; to walk in step.” The word meant to bring together diverse parts and fit them together in perfect harmony. (See the same word in Eph. 4:16 and Col. 2:19.) Love is the secret bond which makes this kind of unity possible (3:14).

To Have All The Riches Of Assured Understanding And The Knowledge Of God’s Mystery – To have all this understanding and knowledge would mean that the Colossians would no longer feel the need to turn to other teachers, who promised secret insights into heaven through philosophy, visions, and asceticism.

“Assured understanding” meant complete confidence or full conviction, even in the face of opposition. (See Heb. 6:11 and 10:22.) God’s “mystery,” as in 1:26, was simply God’s “secret plan” for the salvation of mankind.

Of Christ – Christ was God’s secret plan. He himself was the mystery. He was the only “secret” the Colossians ever needed to learn. (See I Cor. 1:30.)

V. 3 In Whom Are Hid All The Treasures Of Wisdom And Knowledge – The precious “knowledge” offered by the heretics of Colossae and by the later Gnostics was counterfeit. The only real treasures are found in Christ. The Colossians did not need to turn elsewhere to obtain wisdom (1:9, 28; 3:16) or knowledge (1:9, 10; 3:10).

The later Gnostics are known to have made much use of the same word “hid” when they promised access to secret knowledge. It seems there have always been those who prey upon God’s innocent children, promising them a taste of the “forbidden fruit” of the “tree of knowledge.”

V. 4 I Say This In Order That No One May Delude You – Paul was using no clever subtlety. He knew that clear arguments and frank honesty were the best weapons against false teachers.

To “delude” meant to defraud; to reason falsely; to mislead with fallacious reasoning; to “disguise” one’s words.

With Beguiling Speech – This word meant the use of persuasive, plausible arguments. If it had not been used in context with the word “delude,” this word would have been virtuous and admirable.

V. 5 For Though I Am Absent In Body, Yet I Am With You In Spirit – If not restrained by the chains of imprisonment, Paul would have been with them in person. As it was, he was with them in the only manner possible to him—in his spirit. Notice the parallel in I Cor. 5:3-5.

Rejoicing To See Your Good Order And The Firmness Of Your Faith In Christ – As in the epistle to the Philippians, Paul found reason for rejoicing even in imprisonment (Col. 1:24). He rejoiced in their “good order,” a word used to describe either a well-arranged army or a carefully organized household. He also rejoiced in their “firmness” of faith, a word denoting firm structure and solidity.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. In what way had the Colossians been “estranged” from God? What had caused this estrangement?
2. Why the emphasis on Jesus’ “body of flesh” in his work of reconciliation?

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

3. List the words which describe the mature Christian in 1:23, 28; 2:2 and 5.
4. What was lacking in the afflictions of Christ? How did Paul complete what was lacking?
5. What was Paul's "divine office"?
6. What is the "mystery" of God said to be in 1:27 and 2:2?
7. Was Paul interested in developing an elite group of super-saints?
8. If "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hid in Christ, where does modern knowledge about medicine, physics, etc. fit in?
9. Are there people today who try to delude God's family with beguiling speech? What makes them so appealing?
10. How could Paul rejoice in the good order and firmness of the Colossian church when it was surrounded with heresy?

Lesson Nine

(2:6-23)

Steadfast Life In Christ (2:6-15)

6 As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established

in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

V. 6 As Therefore You Received Christ Jesus The Lord – The unchanging standard of truth for all Christians is Jesus Christ and the gospel as originally preached. The Colossians could test for themselves to determine whether a new teaching was in line with the original truth or not (Col. 1:23; Gal. 1:9).

So Live In Him – Literally, "walk in him." The picture of the Christian life as a "walk" is common in Paul's letters (1:10), showing that the Christian life has movement, direction, and purpose.

When the Colossians originally heard the simple truth of the gospel, they gave their allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Now Paul called for them to live their lives in a manner that was consistent with that beginning.

As Paul was about to explain in detail, to "live in him" includes both right doctrine (2:8-23) and right conduct (3:1-4:6).

V. 7 Rooted And Built Up In Him – Paul blended two pictures here to describe the desired firmness of life in Christ. "Rooted" as a tree and "built upon a foundation" as a house, the Christian will have the strength and endurance to stand against the onslaught of evil.

Notice how often "in him," "in Christ," and "with him" occur in these verses. It has been well said that the best summary of the message of Colossians is simply the phrase, "in him."

And Established In The Faith – "Established" had become primarily a legal term in the Greek language. It referred to things that were legal and valid; hence, certain and reliable. If Christian faith is "rooted and built up" in Christ, it will be unshakable and durable. (See Eph. 4:14.)

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Just As You Were Taught – Again the test of originality was applied. Was their faith and conduct in line with the original teaching? The emphasis was on the finality and sufficiency of “the faith once for all delivered.”

Abounding In Thanksgiving – If they would learn to be properly grateful for life in Christ, they would be much less vulnerable to the appeal of false teaching.

V. 8 See To It That No One Makes A Prey Of You – The present tense of the command “see to it” meant that the Colossians must “watch and keep on watching” against false teaching. If they were not vigilant, the false teachers would “rob” them and “carry them off as booty.”

By Philosophy And Empty Deceit – Everything that had to do with theories about God and the world and the meaning of human life was called “philosophy” (literally, “love of wisdom”). This was true not only among the Greeks, but even among the Jews. Philosophy is not in itself a bad thing. Everyone has an understanding of what life is all about, and this is his philosophy. It is when philosophy becomes divorced from God and married to “empty deceit” that it is dangerous.

According To Human Tradition – Sometimes the theories of men are perpetuated in opposition to the revealed truth of God. As they are handed down from generation to generation, they acquire the dignity of “tradition.”

According To The Elemental Spirits Of The Universe – The word “spirits” is not in the Greek text and should not have been added to our translation here. (It is true that the word “elemental” was used in connection with spirit beings in the 4th century A.D., but this usage was unknown when Paul wrote Colossians.) Just as in the parallel uses of “elemental” in Gal. 4:3, 9 and Heb. 5:12, it was “elemental principles” of legalism that Paul meant. This brings the phrase into harmony with the preceding line (“according to human tradition”) and with the usage of the same word in 2:20. When they died to the “elemental things” in 2:20, they no longer belonged to the world and its regulations.

And Not According To Christ – This is what made the philosophy, traditions, and elementary principles wrong: they were not according to Christ.

V. 9 For In Him The Whole Fulness Of Deity Dwells Bodily – The Colossians did not need empty theories and speculation; they had everything in Christ. The totality of divine attributed and nature dwelt in him. Paul went beyond the similar statement of 1:19 to add a crucial word: “bodily.” Contrary to the teachings of the philosophy of “dualism” (1:15). God was not totally withdrawn from physical reality. He had entered time and space in a human body, in the person of Jesus Christ.

V. 10 You Have Come To Fulness Of Life In Him – Our only hope of fulness of life lies in him who possessed the whole fulness of deity. Compare Eph. 1:23 and 3:19.

Who Is The Head Of All Rule And Authority – Christ is not only the head of the church (1:18); he is the head over everything (Eph. 1:22). Even the angelic ranks (“rule” and “authority”) are in subjection to him (1:16).

V. 11 In Him Also You Were Circumcised – Circumcision was the mark of belonging to the old covenant (Gen. 17:10). It was performed on male babies on the eighth day, without their understanding or consent. The Colossians needed to understand that the old inferior ritual had been superseded by something far superior.

With A Circumcision Made Without Hands, By Putting Off The Body Of Flesh In The Circumcision Of Christ – The badge of belonging to the new covenant was not an external cutting of the flesh, but a spiritual circumcision of the heart (Heb. 8:7-13). Only the voluntary surrender of one’s own heart could bring him into the covenant. No one else could do it to him or for him; he must himself choose to put off the ways of the flesh and put on Christ.

V. 12 And You Were Buried With Him In Baptism – Notice how closely connected are the “circumcision of Christ” and the burial in baptism. Both are a putting off of the old flesh (Rom. 6:1-6) and are an initiation into Christ (Gal. 3:27). The baptismal water holds no mystic cleansing power, but initiation into Christ does have that power. Baptism is an integral part of that initiation (Acts 2:38; Eph. 4:5).

In Which You Were Also Raised With Him Through Faith In The Working Of God – It is only through faith that baptism takes on any significance. As an act of faith, it is man’s way of saying “yes” to the gospel. Baptism is simply the response of faith—the response specified by God.

Paul’s main emphasis here lies in the fact that Christians are also “raised with him” (Rom. 6:4-11). This fact provides the ethical basis for the Christian life (3:1) and the foundation of thought for most of the rest of the epistle.

Who Raised Him From The Dead – As in Eph. 1:19-21, the supreme demonstration of the “working of God” is the resurrection.

V. 13 And You, Who Were Dead In Trespasses – Their “mis-steps” had produced separation from God (1:21), which is spiritual death (Eph. 2:5).

And The Uncircumcision Of Your Flesh – They had not “put off the body of flesh” by surrender to Christ.

God Made Alive Together With Him, Having Forgiven Us All Our Trespasses – God “freely forgave”

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

(*charizomai*) our sins when we were hopelessly dead in them (Eph. 2:4-8). Just as he raised Jesus from the tomb, he gave us new spiritual life.

V. 14 Having Canceled The Bond Which Stood Against Us – There was a “bond” against us, an enormous “handwritten acknowledgement of debt.” God “canceled” this by “erasing or wiping it out.”

With Its Legal Demands – The great debt was our failure to live up to all the ordinances and requirements of the law. Neither by the Law of Moses nor by any human set of laws could human behavior be successfully regulated.

This He Set Aside, Nailing It To The Cross – Christ paid our enormous I.O.U. when he died on the cross. He abolished the law of commandments (Eph. 2:15) forever abolishing law as the means of salvation.

Christ did not die at Calvary, nailing the law to the cross, only to bind his followers with another set of legal requirements just like the old. The New Testament must not be perverted into a legal code-book containing hundreds of written (or implied) requirements for salvation.

V. 15 He Disarmed The Principalities And Powers – Satan and his hosts (1:16; 2:10) had only one real weapon against God’s children: accusation. (The name “Devil” means “accuser.”) God “stripped” our foes of this weapon by satisfying all claims against us with the sacrifice of his sinless Son.

And Made A Public Example Of Them, Triumphant Over Them In Him – The picture is that of a victory parade with the enemies driven in humiliation and defeat before the chariot of the Conqueror. The Colossians should not worship angels (v. 18), but the One to whom all angels (even “principalities and powers”) are subject.

Let No One Disqualify You (2:16-23)

16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or what regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. 17 These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to

human precepts and doctrines? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

V. 16 Therefore Let No One Pass Judgment On You – It is one thing to voluntarily give up “eating meat or drinking wine or anything that makes your brother stumble” (Rom. 14:21). It is quite a different thing to allow anyone to put you into subjection to their legalistic judgments. The Christian must give up his rights for the good of a weaker brother; but he must staunchly refuse to give up his rights to a would-be religious dictator.

Questions Of Food Or Drink Or With Regard To A Festival Or A New Moon Or A Sabbath – These were typical Jewish concerns, revealing the Jewish flavor of the Colossian heresy. Certain foods were forbidden to all Jews (Lev. 11), and wine was forbidden to Nazarites (Num. 6:3). Special sacrifices and other observances were made at the yearly feasts (“festivals”), the beginning of each month (“new moon”), and on the Sabbath. The Christian must not become subject to these (Gal. 4:10-11).

V. 17 These Are Only A Shadow Of What Is To Come; But The Substance Belongs To Christ. – The rituals and sacrifices of the old law were predictive in nature. They were the shadow (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) which appeared before the substance (“body”) could be seen. Like a shadow, they had no independent reality or purpose apart from the body.

V. 18 Let No One Disqualify You – This was an athletic term for the decision of the umpire to disqualify a runner and thus deprive him of the prize. Since it was God who “qualified” (1:12) the Colossians for their share in the glory, they should not think any man had the right to disqualify them.

Insisting On Self-Abasement – What follows is a list of some specific teachings of the Colossian heresy. “Self-abasement” was elaborate “humility,” especially as expressed in fasting. Fasting may be beneficial to special seasons of prayer, but it can never be urged on Christians as a requirement of God.

Worship Of Angels – Following the close of the Old Testament, there was much Jewish speculation about angels; but the actual worship of angels was foreign to the Jews. This part of the heresy was a pagan contribution.

Taking His Stand On Visions – This phrase is difficult to translate, as may be seen by the variety of renderings in English versions. Perhaps it had to do with the “mystery religions” of the ancient East. A key part of this phrase was used in these cults for “entering the sanctuary and seeing the secret.” Whatever it was, the Colossian heretics were trying to promote some kind of special knowledge or experience known only to the elite.

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Puffed Up Without Reason By His Sensuous Mind – “Knowledge puffs up” (I Cor. 8:1), especially when that knowledge is a product of “the mind of his flesh.”

V. 19 Not Holding Fast To The Head – Parts of the body in Colossae had detached themselves from the head, taking inflated pride in their private religious experiences. This was the fundamental problem of the Colossian heresy.

From Whom The Whole Body, Nourished And Knit Together – As long as the body holds fast to the head, it is nourished (“abundantly supplied” as in Phil. 1:19) and knit together (“diverse parts brought into harmony” as in Col. 2:2). The body is tightly united with joints and ligaments (Eph. 4:16), so that the parts must not separate from one another.

A Growth That Is From God – Parts that are separated from the Head cannot grow. They may have an appearance of growth by some human perspective, but they will not have the growth that comes from God.

V. 20 If With Christ You Died To The Elemental Spirits Of The Universe – As in verse 8, the word “spirits” is wrong. The “elemental things” to which the Christian has died are the rudimentary principles of law. No longer should the Christian submit to the legal demands (2:14) of self-earned righteousness. Because of Calvary, he is dead to legal decrees.

Why Do You Live As If You Still Belonged To The World? – They would belong to the world by trying to invent their own religion and by working their way to heaven. Thus, they would have denied that they belonged to God and that he had freely given (2:13) them salvation in Christ.

Why Do You Submit To Regulations – Literally, “why do you allow yourselves to be dogmatized?” Regulations and restrictions may be a necessary evil in other parts of society, but they are intolerable as the basis of right standing with God.

“Do Not Handle, Do Not Taste, Do Not Touch” – This was the three-point sermon of the Colossian false teacher. This was the secret route to heaven, the escape from the depravity of the flesh. Stifle yourself and leash your desires!

The Christian, to the contrary, gets a new self and puts to death the old desires. Inward renewal makes outward restraint unnecessary.

V. 22 (Referring To Things Which All Perish As They Are Used) – Holy diet is not the essence of righteousness. Jesus dealt with those who taught human “precepts and doctrines” (same words here as in Mark 7:7) by teaching that food merely passes on through and out of the body (Mark 7:15-19). Defilement is not a matter of the diet, but of the heart.

V. 23 These Have Indeed An Appearance Of Wisdom – The acts of asceticism may seem very holy and may carry the “repute of wisdom.”

In Promoting Rigor Of Devotion – This could also be translated “voluntary will-worship.” It refers to a self-imposed asceticism in which one’s own will power is exalted as worthy of admiration.

The Christian ascetics of the fourth and fifth centuries were the marvels of the ancient world. They could subsist for years on bread and water, voluntarily chained in caves, never uttering a single sound. Their will power was phenomenal, but what was really accomplished?

Self-Abasement – This is the same word as in verse 18, carrying special emphasis on fasting.

Severity To The Body – Being “unsparing” to the body. The body, of course, was evil. Therefore, it deserved to be mercilessly abused.

But They Are Of No Value In Checking The Indulgence Of The Flesh – Asceticism often backfires. Instead of freeing a person from his flesh, it actually focuses his attention all the more on fleshly concerns. He is so busy concentrating his will power against his flesh that he cannot set his mind on things above (3:2).

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is philosophy? Is it always bad?
2. What is the special significance of the word “bodily” in verse 9?
3. What was the purpose of circumcision in the Old Testament?
4. How are baptism and circumcision similar? How are they different?
5. What was nailed to the cross with Jesus?
6. When God “disarmed” the principalities and powers, what did he take away from them?

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

7. What was the Colossian heresy? Make a list of its direct teachings from verses 8, 16, 18, 21, and 23.
8. Where can you find parallels to these false teachings in the world today?
9. What is the picture behind the words “Let no one disqualify you”?
10. What is “rigor of devotion” in verse 23?

Lesson 10

(3:1-17)

Seek The Things Above (3:1-4)

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

V. 1 If Then You Have Been Raised With Christ – These words parallel the words of 2:20, “if with Christ you died.” The earlier verse emphasized the negative aspects of death; this verse emphasizes the positive aspects of new life. This verse introduces a strong moral exhortation: If you have been raised to a new life, then live like it!

As most commentators note, the imagery of baptism may be seen in these verses. The penitent believer dies to the old life and is raised to the new (Rom. 6:1-7). Baptism vividly pictures this burial and resurrection.

Seek The Things That Are Above – The present tense of this command makes the action continuous: “seek and keep on seeking.” The Christian fixes his eyes on a heavenly goal (Heb. 11:10; 12:2) and presses on toward that goal (Phil. 3:14).

Where Christ Is, Seated At the Right Hand Of God – The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah

would sit at God’s right hand (Ps. 110:1), the supreme position of shared authority. This important concept was central in apostolic preaching (Acts 2:33; 5:33; 7:55, 56) and in the epistles (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; I Pet. 3:22, Rev. 3:21).

V. 2 Set Your Minds On Things That Are Above – Paul did not want the Colossian Christians to turn from the extreme of asceticism, condemned in 2:21-23, to the extreme of total permissiveness. The Christian who has been set free from the legalistic demands of the law must not think he is exempt from all moral restraints and can indulge himself at will.

Christian morality is the product of adopting a new way of thinking. The Christian has a new “mind” or attitude (as in Phil. 2:5 and 3:15) which sees things from God’s frame of reference. The more the Christian’s mind is attuned with the mind of God, the less the Christian needs external restraints. He is free to do whatever he wants because his “wants” are the “wants” of God.

Not On Things That Are On Earth – The attitudes to be avoided are specified in verses 5 to 11, the attitudes to be adopted are listed in verses 12 to 17.

V. 3 For You Have Died – Conversion from the old life, climaxed in baptism, was already a past reality for them. Therefore, Paul’s exhortation to them was this: “You have died—now live like it!”

And Your Life Is Hid With Christ In God – The Christian has died to the present world; his life belongs to God’s world. The words of a hymn by John Newton aptly comment on this line:

Rejoice, believer, in the Lord,
Who makes your cause His own;
The hope that’s founded on His word
Can ne’er be overthrown.

Though many foes beset your road,
And feeble is your arm,
Your life is hid with Christ in God,
Beyond the reach of harm.

V. 4 When Christ Who Is Our Life Appears – Christ is our life. He is the source, sustainer, and redeemer of our lives. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20). Henceforth, to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21). We live each day in the confident expectation that Christ will suddenly return from heaven and take us to our home in glory (Phil. 3:21; II Cor. 5:1).

Then You Also Will Appear With Him In Glory – When Christ returns, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:2). He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21), and we shall dwell with him in “unapproachable light,” full of glory.

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Put Off The Old Nature (3:5-11)

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you once walked, when you lived in them. 8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices 10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

V. 5 Put To Death Therefore – Since the Christian has died to the old life (v. 3), it is inappropriate that he should retain any of the old lifestyle. Step by step he must completely root out the elements of his former life. The old way of life did not immediately cease to exist when new life began. Therefore, it must be put to death.

What Is Earthly In You – Notice that the sins which make up “what is earthly in you” (v. 5-9) are sins which stem from the heart. They are not primarily external sins; most of them are not even illegal in any human court.

Immorality – Immorality, or fornication, includes the whole broad spectrum of sexual sin: adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, etc.

Impurity – Impurity, or uncleanness, is moral defilement. In the Old Testament, it made a person unfit to go before the presence of God at the temple.

Passion – This word expresses an emotion so strong it overwhelms reason. It is closely linked to the next word.

Evil Desire – Also translated “lust,” this kind of evil greed carries sexual overtones.

Covetousness – Literally, “have-more-ness.” In the Old Testament, covetousness was wanting what belonged to someone else (Ex. 20:17). In the New Testament, it is simply greed—wanting more and more and more.

Which Is Idolatry – Greed is idolatry because it becomes Number One in our lives. It is treason against heaven because it bumps God off the throne of our heart.

Barclay points out that personal greed was the real reason ancient people bowed down before images of stone. Most of the gods they worshipped were fertility gods, and the people were trying to tap the gods’ power or good luck for themselves. If they could just make it work, they would have better crops, larger flocks, and many sons.

V. 6 On Account Of These The Truth Of God Is Coming – Defiance of God’s will brings God’s wrath. Despite the fact that the wrath of God is mentioned over thirty times in the New Testament, many people refuse to admit their peril.

The phrase “upon the sons of disobedience” (as in Eph. 5:6) has been omitted in the RSV, although it is found in some of the oldest manuscripts.

V. 7 In These You Once Walked, When You Lived In Them – Their way of life was the way of death. Now, as Christians, they could better appreciate their new life by remembering the old. The words “walked” and “lived” underscore the completeness of sin in their old lives.

V. 8 But Now Put Them All Away – The Christian must “put away” and “put off” (v. 9) the old practices so that he can then “put on” (v. 12) the new.

Anger – This word for sustained anger is the same word usually used for the “wrath of God” (as in v. 6). Man cannot sustain this emotion without sin (James 1:20), but God can. (Consider Rom. 12:19.)

Wrath – This is the sudden outburst of temper. It is no better, or worse, than sustained anger. Both are incompatible with the new life (Eph. 4:31).

Malice – An evil disposition.

Slander – Literally, “blasphemy.” Slander is the verbal expression which betrays one’s contempt for either God or man.

Foul Talk From Your Mouth – Literally, “shameful speech.” This is the same as the filthiness of speech in Eph. 5:4.

V. 9 Do Not Lie To One Another – The construction of the Greek sentence implies, “Stop lying to one another.” The Christian must have total commitment to the truth.

Seeing That You Have Put Off The Old Nature – The Christian has “stripped off” the old nature just as he would a filthy garment.

V. 10 And Have Put On The New Nature – The Christian “clothes” himself with Christ (Gal. 3:27). Specific aspects of this new “clothing” are listed in verses 12-17.

Which Is Being Renewed In Knowledge After The Image Of Its Creator – Adam was created by God “in his own image” (Gen. 1:27) but fell into sin. Christ has ransomed us from sin and has given us the opportunity to be what Adam was meant to be. In the continuing process of renewal, our minds are becoming the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). (Compare Eph. 4:22-24.)

V. 11 Here There Cannot Be Greek And Jew, Circumcised And Uncircumcised – When the Christian had put on Christ, the old categories become irrelevant (Gal. 3:27-28). It no longer matters whether a person was Jew or Gentile, for circumcision no longer matters (Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

Barbarian, Scythian – Originally, a barbarian was someone so stupid he did not speak your language, a

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

foreigner. A Scythian was the lowest class of barbarian, “differing little from wild beasts” (Josephus). They scalped their enemies and used the hollowed-out skull as a drinking vessel for unmixed wine. Yet even they, as Christians, became equal with the rest.

Slave, Free Man – While slaves were the same as free men in the eyes of God, it should be noted that they still had to behave as obedient slaves to their earthly masters (v. 22).

But Christ Is All, And In All – Any refusal to accept one’s brother because of the old categories is a denial of Christ’s lordship over that category. It is a denial of the Lord’s ability to transcend class distinctions and to live in certain kinds of people.

Put On The New Nature (3:12-17)

12 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, 13 forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

V. 12 Put On Then, As God’s Chosen Ones, Holy And Beloved – An in v. 10, God’s children should get dressed with the right clothing. Filthy rags are not suitable for children of a King!

What about the expression “chosen ones”? How does one get to be a part of this group? Jesus made it clear in the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. 22:1-14). While the king invited many people to his feast, only those who accepted the invitation were called “chosen” (v. 14).

Compassion – Literally, “bowels of mercies.” See the comments on Phil. 1:8.

Kindness – The excellent and gracious disposition which also stoops to help those in need.

Lowliness – This “humility of mind” should be contrasted with the kind of false humility demanded by the false teachers of Colossae (2:18).

Meekness – Meekness is not weakness; it is strength held under control. The Greeks used this word to describe a quality of gentleness found in a well-trained watch-dog or horse.

Patience – This is the ability to be “long-suffering” with difficult people (1:11).

V. 13 Forbearing One Another – Literally, “putting up with one another.” Since Christians are going to spend eternity together, they may as well learn to get along!

If One Has A Complaint Against Another, Forgiving Each Other – Human relationships inevitably produce some friction. Whenever we want to “blame” someone for something, we should first remember how much the Lord has forgiven us. Then it will be much easier to forgive others (Matt. 18:21-35).

V. 14 And Above All These Put On Love – Love is the crowning glory of the Christian graces. It sums up all God’s commandments (Gal. 5:14) and is the sum total of all the Christian virtues.

Which Binds Everything Together In Perfect Harmony – Love “ties it all together in completeness.” Love is the energizing force which makes unity operative.

V. 15 Let The Peace Of Christ Rule In Your Hearts – The word translated “rule” originally meant “act as umpire.” The Christian must accord to no man the right to disqualify him (2:18), for the umpire in his life is the peace of Christ. This peace should rule over us individually, as well as in the collective body—the church.

To Which Indeed You Were Called In The One Body – God has called us in peace (I Cor. 7:15). It is the intention that Christians should make up one body—not many—and should live in peace with one another.

And Be Thankful – All of Christian behavior is simply the response of gratitude toward God.

V. 16 Let The Word Of Christ Dwell In You Richly – In other words, let the gospel take full root in your heart. Let it live in your life and dominate your conduct.

As You Teach And Admonish One Another In All Wisdom – Paul’s ministry of admonishing and teaching every man (1:28) is also the mutual ministry which Christians exercise toward one another. It seems likely that the following words about singing should be taken as one means by which this teaching is done (Eph. 5:19).

As You Sing Psalms And Hymns And Spiritual Songs With Thankfulness In Your Hearts To God – Christians let the word of Christ dwell in them richly and teach one another when they sing praises to God. “Psalms” were no doubt songs from the O.T. book of Psalms; “hymns” were probably songs of praise composed by the Christians themselves; and “spiritual songs” were perhaps spontaneous songs inspired by the Holy spirit (I Cor. 14:15).

About 200 A.D., Tertullian described the Christian love-feast in this way: “After water for the hands and lights have been brought in, each is invited to sing to God

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

in the presence of the others from what he knows of the holy scriptures or from his own heart.”

V. 17 And Whatever You Do, In Word Or Deed –

The Christian must not divide his life into “Sunday behavior” and “everyday behavior.” Since God is always with him, anything that is out of place on Sunday is always out of place.

This broad commandment made it unnecessary for Paul to list any further “Do’s” and Don’t’s.” The Christian life does not consist of outward conformity with a legal code, but inward renewal of the heart.

Do Everything In The Name Of The Lord Jesus –

This general principle is far better than an exhaustive code of laws. If a certain practice cannot be done in the name of Jesus, don’t do it!

Giving Thanks To God The Father Through Him

– Christian behavior may be summed up as the life lived in gratitude toward God (v. 15). When one is constantly aware of the debt of love he owes to God, it will be hard for him to stray very far from the paths of righteousness.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What things are included in “things that are on earth”?
2. What is the basis of Paul’s exhortation toward moral excellence in verse one?
3. What is meant by the statement “you also will appear with him in glory”?
4. How is idolatry linked with covetousness?
5. What is the difference between anger and wrath? Is the “wrath of God” a defect in God’s character?
6. What was a Scythian? Why did Paul mention them?
7. Explain “God’s chosen ones.” Who does the choosing?
8. Can you think of any virtue that is not included in the concept of love?
9. In what way does “be thankful” (v. 15) relate to the Christian’s behavior?
10. Is verse 16 describing a “church service”? How does this verse relate to verse 17?

Lesson Eleven

(3:18 - 4:1)

Instructions For The Family (3:18-21)

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

V. 18 Wives – If the new nature in a Christian really reaches into every area of his behavior (v. 17), it will affect his family and his job. Paul was not abruptly changing the subject at this point. He was showing individual Christians specific ways in which they would live the new life.

Ladies, first. . . .

Be Subject To Your Husbands – “Be subject was a military term meaning “to be arranged under the authority of someone.” God set the husband as the head of the family (Eph. 5:23) and commanded the wife to respect his leadership (Eph. 5:33). The command is expressed here as a present imperative, meaning “be subject and keep on being subject” in a continuing way.

A few points need to be made here about the Bible’s teaching on the submission of the wife to the husband (I Cor. 11:3-16; 14:34-36; Eph. 5:21-33; Titus 2:5; I Pet. 3:1-6). First, notice that the wives are told to be subject; the husbands are not told to put them in subjection. The husband’s responsibility is not to get the upper hand over

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

his wife; his duty is to love her (v. 19). Voluntary submission is the wife's responsibility. If she is unwilling to assume that role voluntarily, it is doubtful that forcing the role upon her will achieve God's purposes.

Second, the wife's submission and the husband's love are something they owe the Lord, even more than they owe each other. Even if the husband is a clod, the wife should be subject to him, because the Lord is no clod and He deserves to be obeyed. Even if the wife is unlovely, the husband should love her, because he owes it to the Lord. This principle adds permanency to marriage. The relationship is not based on fickle responses to a fickle spouse, but on steadfast obedience to an unchanging Lord.

Third, God's recipe for happiness in the Christian family cannot be guaranteed if part of the ingredients are left out. If a Christian wife submits, but an un-Christian husband does not love, the results may not be satisfactory. Even so, the best chance a Christian wife has in this unfortunate situation is to submit and try to make it work. (See I Pet. 3:1-2.)

Fourth, the husband has not been appointed to be God. His authority is only a delegated authority and has limitations. Consider the parallel between the family and the government. Just as the wife is to "be subject" (*hupotassethe*) to her husband, the Christian citizen is to "be subject" (*hupotassasthe*) to his government (Rom. 13:1). The Christian submits to his government because God ordained it, and to disobey is to resist God's command (Rom. 13:2). However, if government tries to oppose the clear and specific command of God, the Christian's highest allegiance is to God (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Likewise, the wife is subject to her husband because God made the husband head (Eph. 5:23). If, however, the husband comes into irreconcilable conflict with the authority of God, the wife's highest allegiance is to God. (Compare Luke 14:26; I Cor. 7:15.)

As Is Fitting In The Lord – The word "fitting" refers to what is "proper, one's duty, the service one owes." It is more than just what is "socially acceptable," for it is one's duty "in the Lord."

V. 19 Husbands – It may have shocked some of the first century readers, but husbands also have a duty toward their wives. Until now, husbands had all the rights and privileges, and wives had all the duties. According to Jewish law, for instance, a husband could divorce his wife, but a wife could not divorce her husband.

In Roman, Greek, and Jewish law, adultery could be committed only against the husband—not against the wife. If a man's wife had a sexual affair with any other man, it was adultery against her husband. If the husband had an affair with an unmarried or foreign woman, it was not adultery. If he had an affair with the wife of his

countryman, it was adultery—but against his countryman, not against his own wife!

Christianity made marriage a joint responsibility.

Love Your Wives – The husband's responsibility is not to dominate his wife, but to love her.

The kind of love God commands from the husband for his wife is *agape* love. This is the divine kind of love, motivated not by self-interest (as *eros*, the sexual love) or even by the attractiveness of the one loved (as *philia*), but by a sincere interest in the well-being of the other. Love based on self-interest will fail whenever the object of love fails to gratify selfish lusts. Love based on attractiveness will fail whenever the object of love grows older, fatter, sicker, or balder. True *agape* love includes sexual desire and appreciation for attractive qualities, but it is based on a permanent concern for the one loved. It is the only love that goes on loving whether circumstances are better or worse, whether richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death parts the lovers.

In the parallel passage in Eph. 5:21-33, Paul found in Christ the perfect example of a husband's love and a wife's submissiveness. As the church submits to Christ as head, so should the wife submit to her husband. As Christ gave himself up for the church, so should the husband give of himself and be sacrificially concerned for the well-being of his wife.

And Do Not Be Harsh With Them – It seems a strange quirk of human nature that sometimes we treat worst those whom we love most. It is, after all, those who are the closest to us who have the greatest capacity to provoke us.

Sometimes the husband is harsh because he is trying to prove he is the boss. Sometimes he acts out of bitterness to retaliate against the woman responsible for his "loss of freedom." Sometimes he is cross because she has failed him by not living up to his "expectations." All of these are simply the result of the husband's focus of attention on himself instead of on his wife. This is not love.

V. 20 Children, Obey Your Parents In Everything – The word "obey" literally means "to hear under." It means that one must give heed to the person in authority and do what he says. The word "obey" is also directed toward slaves (v. 22), but is never used as a commandment for the wife.

This is one of the few commandments in the Bible given specifically to children. Whatever else the church teaches children, it must not fail to teach them to obey their parents. Obedience to parents is a child's basic training to prepare him for obedience to God.

What about the phrase "in everything"? Must a child always obey his parents no matter how wicked or evil their

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

command might be? First, it is to be assumed that Paul had a Christian family in mind. While the parents may be unwise, they would hardly be evil. In such a situation, the child should always obey. Second, the authority of parents is a delegated authority and is subordinate to the authority of God. If a child is told to steal or kill, for instance, divine law obviously takes precedence.

For This Pleases The Lord – In the original Ten Commandments, the command to honor one’s parents was the only commandment with the promise of a reward (Eph. 6:1-4). The Lord finds great “delight” in obedient children.

V. 21 Fathers – Again, there is a mutual responsibility. Contrary to the Roman law of the first century, fathers owed their children certain duties in return. According to Roman law, a father could do anything he liked with his child. He could reject it at birth, casting it out of the house to die. He could sell the child into slavery, work him in the fields, or even pronounce and execute the legal sentence of death.

Do Not Provoke Your Children – The father must realize that his child has certain sensitivities. Whether in “jest” or in anger, he must not wound the child’s inner being and sense of self-respect. Some of the more obvious ways to provoke (“rouse to fight, irritate, chafe”) a child are:

- a. Ridicule, especially in public
- b. Constant criticism
- c. Impossible proliferation of rules
- d. Unfair punishment

In every child there is a deep-seated sense of what is fair and right. The wise parent will work with this sensitivity, not against it.

Lest They Become Discouraged – A child can only take so much. If he is provoked beyond his limit, he will give up; he will “despair” of ever pleasing his parents. He may resign himself to a life of quiet failure, or he may become totally defiant. It all depends on how much spunk he has. Either way, the parent has failed.

Instructions For Slaves And Masters (3:22 – 4:1)

22 Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord; 23 Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

V. 22 Slaves – The practice of slavery was widespread in the first century. As much as one-third of the population of Rome and other great cities was made up of slaves. Slaves were considered inferior by birth, naturally fitted for slavery. Slaves were mere chattel property, completely at the disposal of their masters. Masters had the legal right to torture or kill their slaves. Finally under the emperor Hadrian (117-138 A.D.), masters were required to get permission from the court before killing a slave; and under Constantine (306-337 A.D.), the practice was prohibited altogether. Even Constantine, however, said it was all right if the slave died accidentally as the result of a good flogging.

Obey In Everything Those Who Are Your Earthly Masters – Although a slave was the same as a free man in the eyes of God (v. 11), he still had to live out the role of a slave here on earth. If his master was a Christian, he could not take advantage of his brotherly equality and serve him any less (I Tim. 6:1-2). If his master was not a Christian, he could not treat him with contempt, but must be a model servant for the sake of the gospel (Titus 2:9-10). Whether the master was gentle or overbearing, the slave must be obedient and submissive (I Pet. 2:18).

Why did Paul support the evil practice of slavery? Why didn’t he sound the call to revolt? First of all, it would not have been good for Christianity to tie itself to a slave revolt. The difficult circumstances of the first century were not to be solved by so simple a remedy. Other revolts had been attempted, and they always failed. Christianity had a solution that was slower, but more long lasting—the teaching of brotherhood. Second, Paul knew that a man did not have to be personally and politically free to be a Christian. He could be God’s child whether slave or free. Third, Paul knew that it was more important that a man learn obedience and servanthood—the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5)—than that he enjoy the luxury of liberty. In at least one sense, it was easier for a slave to become Christ-like than for a free man.

Not With Eyeservice, As Men-Pleasers – Paul apparently coined the Greek word for “eyeservice,” since it is found nowhere except here and the parallel passage in Eph. 6:5-9. The picture of the slave who works only when being watched is so clear that it needs no explanation.

But In Singleness Of Heart – The slave must serve his master with “sincere, single-minded purpose.”

Fearing The Lord – It is not the lashes of the overseer’s whip but the fear of the Lord that should goad the slave into action. Three verses in succession carry this same theme: It is the Lord, not men, whom you serve.

V. 23 Whatever Your Task, Work Heartily – Naturally the slaves were given the jobs that were too hard or dirty for a free man to do. Regardless of this, the

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Christian slave should work with a zealous commitment springing from his heart.

Note: If this principle was valid for the involuntary slave, how much more should it apply to the modern employee who willingly agreed to do his job?

As Serving The Lord And Not Men – The faithful service of a slave would not only bring money to his early master, it would also bring honor and glory to his Master in heaven.

V. 24 Knowing That From The Lord You Will Receive The Inheritance As Your Reward – The slave should not be distressed if he does not receive fair recompense for all his labor. The Lord in heaven is also keeping track of the books, and He will see that the worker gets all his back pay—and more! When he receives his eternal inheritance (1:12), he will be amply repaid for his troubles.

You Are Serving The Lord Christ – For the third time, Paul has repeated this. The slave is not really working for his earthly master, but for the Lord!

V. 25 For The Wrongdoer Will Be Paid Back For The Wrong He Has Done – There will be a great evening of the scales of justice in heaven. The exploited slave will finally receive his due. The exploiting master will also receive his due, when the Lord gives him his inheritance in hell.

And There Is No Partiality – Unlike Roman law, God does not have a separate system of justice for masters. There is no “face-taking” with God, for he treats all men alike. If a man has been cruel and abusive, he will be punished, no matter who he is.

God is not one-sided in his social concerns. He is neither pro-labor nor pro-management. He wants each side to take care of its own responsibilities. The same God who wants soldiers to “be content with your wages”(Luke 3:14) is also outraged when the wages of the laborers are kept back by fraud (James 5:4). If anything, God’s wrath seems to be hottest against those who become wealthy by withholding from their workers. (See James 5:1-6.)

V. 1 Masters, Treat Your Slaves Justly And Fairly – Once again, as in the family, there is mutual obligation. Regardless of legal constraints, the master is obligated before God to “provide what is right and equitable” for his slaves. In practice, this meant the master treated the slave more like an employee than a bondservant, ultimately granting him his freedom.

Knowing That You Also Have A Master In Heaven – This simple reminder was much more effective in bringing an end to slavery than an open revolt would have been. God will treat the master according to the way he treated his slaves! The earthly masters would one day stand before the court of heaven on equal footing with

their slaves. There they would answer for the way they had treated some of God’s children.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How does the instruction for wives fit into modern society? Should women wear a veil, cover their heads, and walk two paces behind their husbands?
2. Does the husband’s love for his wife mean that he will sometimes subordinate his own wishes to the well-being of the wife? Is he then in “submission” to her?
3. Why should children obey their parents?
4. How can a father provoke his child? Can you add to the list given with verse 21?
5. What was slavery like in the first century? How did people justify such treatment of their fellowmen?
6. Why didn’t Paul call for an abrupt halt to slavery?
7. Notice that twice as many lines were written about slavery as were written about family duties. Could this have anything to do with the mention of Onesimus in 4:9?
8. For what Master were the slaves really working?
9. Whose side was God on—the slaves’ or the masters’?
10. What were the earthly masters to remember?

Lesson Twelve

(4:2-18)

Final Exhortations (4:2-6)

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; 3 and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, 4 that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.

5 Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one.

V. 2 Continue Steadfastly In Prayer – The Colossians were to “persist in” and “adhere to” prayer. This kind of persistent prayer was characteristic of the early church (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; etc.). It is the kind of prayer Jesus taught, with the determination not to give up (Luke 11:5-13) or grow weary (Luke 18:1-8).

Being Watchful In It With Thanksgiving – To be “watchful” is to be “fully awake and alert.” Prayer time is not to be a casual rest period producing drowsiness. It is a time for action!

Prayer should always be accompanied with thankfulness and gratitude. (See 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17.)

V. 3 And Pray For Us Also – Paul has spoken very little about his own predicament in Rome. Now, finally, one expects to hear him appeal for prayers in his behalf. He does make such an appeal, but with a surprising twist!

That God May Open To Us A Door For The Word – Paul asked prayer not so much for himself as for his work. Even though preaching the gospel had caused him this imprisonment, he was eager for God to open the door to more opportunities. It seems possible that the progress of the gospel among the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13) was a direct answer to this prayer.

To Declare The Mystery Of Christ – It was Paul’s privilege to proclaim Christ, the secret plan of God for the salvation of men (1:25-28).

On Account Of Which I Am In Prison – Literally, “I am bound.” As noted in Phil. 1:12, Paul was not actually in a Roman dungeon. He was in a private dwelling (Acts 28:30), constantly chained to a succession of Roman soldiers.

Even now Paul does not ask for their prayers in behalf of himself and his imprisonment.

V. 4 That I May Make It Clear, As I Ought To Speak – Since the power was in the message (Rom. 1:16) and not the messenger, Paul’s only concern was that he present the message in a clear and “openly manifest” way.

V. 5 Conduct Yourselves Wisely Toward Outsiders – The Colossians were to “walk in wisdom” toward people outside the body of Christ. Their Christian conduct was their best answer to those who might revile and accuse them (I Pet. 3:16).

Some of the earliest accusations against Christians were that they were atheists, cannibals, and participants in love orgies! They were atheists because they rejected all known gods and claimed to worship an “invisible God.” They were cannibals because they ate the flesh and drank the blood of their Leader. They had some kind of secret orgy when they assembled together for their “Love Feast.”

Making The Most Of The Time – This is also translated “redeeming” the time and means to “buy up a precious commodity.” In this case, the commodity is time. It is precious because every Christian lives in a critical point in history, where the eternal destiny of souls hangs in the balance. It is also precious because once it is lost, it can never be regained. (See Eph. 5:16.)

V. 6 Let Your Speech Always Be Gracious – Especially in the context of preaching (v. 3) and behavior toward outsiders (v. 5), the Christian must choose his wording carefully so that it will be “acceptable” and gracious. He is not to compromise the truth, but he must not make the truth unnaturally repulsive by his blunt and offensive presentation.

Seasoned With Salt – Neither is the Christian’s speech to be insipid. His words can be tasteful and appealing. (The pagan use of “salt” to mean “wit” may have some application here.)

So That You May Know How You Ought To Answer Every One – Just as Paul wanted to be able to preach clearly as he ought, he wanted the Colossians to know how to speak in defense of the gospel as they ought. (See I Pet. 3:15.)

Personal Greetings (4:7-18)

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my affairs; he is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 9 and with him Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of yourselves. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, receive him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of yourselves, a servant of Christ, greets you, always remembering you earnestly in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. 15 Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfil the ministry which you have received in the Lord."

18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my fetters. Grace be with you.

V. 7 Tychicus Will Tell You – Tychicus was himself an Asian (Acts 20:4), so he was a logical choice among Paul’s co-workers to deliver the epistles to Ephesus (Eph. 6:21) and Colossae. He is also named as Paul’s messenger in II Tim. 4:12 and Titus 3:12.

Beloved Brother And Faithful Minister And Fellow Servant – The word for “minister” is simply “one who serves,” and the word for “servant” is “slave.” Tychicus and Epaphras (1:7) are the only ones Paul called “fellow-slaves.”

V. 8 I have Sent Him To You For This Very Purpose – If we are correct in connecting Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon as being delivered together (see 1:2), Tychicus was accomplishing a three-fold purpose:

- a. To deliver the three epistles
- b. To encourage the local saints with news about Paul.
- c. To accompany Onesimus, the runaway slave, safely back to his former master.

V. 9 And With Him Onesimus, The Faithful And Beloved Brother, Who Is One Of Yourselves – Onesimus was a runaway slave who had left his master Philemon in Colossae. He had fled to Rome, where he met the imprisoned apostle and was converted (Philemon 10). Now Paul was sending him back, along with Tychicus and a personal note to Philemon.

The phrase “one of yourselves,” meaning “he is a Colossian too,” is also used of Epaphras in verse 12.

V. 10 Aristarchus My Fellow Prisoner Greet You – Aristarchus was a convert from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4) who joined Paul on the third missionary journey (Acts 19:29). During the riot at Ephesus, he was one of the two associates of Paul dragged by the mob into the public assembly. He was also aboard the ship that took Paul to

Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27:2) and shared the imprisonment with him.

And Mark The Cousin Of Barnabas – Mark was the young man who abruptly went home in the middle of the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:13). Because of Mark’s failure, Paul was unwilling to take him on the second journey (Acts 15:36-38). Notice now, however, how completely Paul has received Mark as a fellow worker and how he is eager to have the Colossians receive him too.

V. 11 Jesus Who Is Called Justus – “Jesus” was not an uncommon name, being the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua.

The Only Men Of The Circumcision Among My Fellow Workers – These three—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus—were born and raised as Jews. All of Paul’s other associates at this time were of Gentile birth.

V. 12 Epaphras, Who Is One Of Yourselves – Like Onesimus (v. 9), Epaphras was from Solossae. He had played a key role in the planting of the church in that city (1:7).

A Servant Of Christ – Literally, “slave or bondservant.”

Always Remembering You Earnestly In His Prayers, That You May Stand Mature And Fully Assured In All The Will Of God – The concern of Epaphras was identical to the concern of Paul. He wanted his brethren to be “full-grown” (as in 1:28) and “completely convinced” (as in 2:2). Epaphras was keenly aware of the dangerous new heresy in Colossae, and his earnest prayer was for the qualities which would enable the Colossian Christians to stand against it.

V. 13 He Has Worked Hard For You And For Those In Laodicea And In Hierapolis – Epaphras had worked hard (a common word for “struggle in battle”) to evangelize this important triangle of cities in the Lycus River Valley. Hierapolis (meaning “sacred city”) was located 15 miles north of Colossae and was an important center for several pagan cults. Laodicea was mentioned previously (2:1).

V. 14 Luke The Beloved Physician – It is from this reference that we know the profession of Luke. He was apparently a Gentile Christian (v. 11) who joined Paul on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:10, where Paul’s team changed from “they” to “we”). He was a loyal companion to Paul, staying with him even when all others had left (II Tim. 4:11). He later authored the Gospel according to Luke and the book of Acts.

And Demas – Demas did not remain loyal. Later he was to forsake Paul in prison, “in love with this present world” (II Tim. 4:10).

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

V. 15 Give My Greetings To The Brethren At Laodicea, And To Nympha And The Church In Her House —There is no evidence of churches owning property and erecting special buildings for worship before the third century. In earlier years, the “house-church” seems to have been the norm, since government persecution made anything larger impractical. The following “house-churches” are named in scripture:

- a. House of Philemon (Philemon 2)
- b. House of Mary (Acts 12:12)
- c. House of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19)
- d. House of Nympha (Col. 4:15)
- e. (?) House of Gaius (Rom. 16:23)
- f. (?) House of Lydia (Acts 16:15, 40)

V. 16 And When This Letter Has Been Read Among You, Have It Read Also In The Church Of The Laodiceans; And See That You Read Also The Letter From Laodicea – This letter “out of Laodicea” has been an intriguing puzzle as far back as the second century. The following theories have been suggested concerning this “missing” letter:

- a. It was accidentally lost at an early date. (But this is hardly consistent with the working of God’s providence, which safely guarded the rest of scriptures through the centuries.)
- b. It was judged non-canonical and discarded. (But it was apostolic, and it was suitable for public reading in the churches. These were two of the most important tests of canonicity.)
- c. It became known as the epistle to Philemon. (But there is little evidence to favor this view. Philemon was rather clearly located in Colossae, not Laodicea. Consider Colossians 4:9, 17 and Philemon 2.)
- d. It became known as the epistle to the Ephesians. While this cannot be proved, certain facts are in its favor. Ephesians seems have been a general epistle addressed to more than a single church. It has no personal greetings and addresses no local problems. If such an epistle were intended to circulate throughout all of Asia minor, it would have been sent first to Ephesus and then would have followed the trade route to Laodicea. Then it would have been sent on up the Lycus River (southward) to Colossae. Notice that the letter is not called a letter “to” the Laodiceans, but a letter “out of” Laodicea.

The probability of this connection is enhanced by the similarity of contents between Colossians and Ephesians, by the fact that the words “in Ephesus” (1:3) are lacking in the

earliest manuscripts, and by the fact that Marcion (second century) considered Ephesians to be this epistle.

V. 17 And Say To Archippus – Archippus was apparently a member of Philemon’s household, possibly his son. (See notes on Philemon 2.) He had a certain responsibility in the Colossian church, but no details are known.

“See That You Fulfil The Ministry Which You Have Received In The Lord.” – This public reminder to do his duty might well have been embarrassing to Archippus, but it certainly should have provided the necessary impetus for him to fulfil his task.

V. 18 I, Paul, Write This Greeting With My Own Hand – Paul normally used an amanuensis, or trained scribe, to pen his words. We know, for instance, that the man who wrote down the epistle to the Romans was named Tertius (Rom. 16:22). At the close of each epistle, Paul would then write a few words with his own hand as a mark of genuineness (II Thes. 3:17). In contrast to the neat, professional lettering of a trained scribe, Paul’s penmanship would appear awkwardly large (Gal. 6:11).

Remember My Fetters – Only now did Paul allow himself a personal request. He called attention to his chains (see Phil. 1:13) and implied that they should pray for him in this regard. In the parallel passage in Eph. 6:20, Paul called himself “an ambassador in chains.”

Grace Be With You – As always, Paul concluded his letter with a mention of grace. Grace was God’s unmerited favor which made their salvation possible. Grace was privilege of service which had ultimately led to Paul’s imprisonment (Eph. 3:7-9). Most of all, grace was God’s sufficiency in spite of Paul’s weakness (II Cor. 12:9).

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of prayer does Paul call for?
2. What was Paul’s personal request in his own behalf?
3. How can a Christian influence outsiders favorably for the gospel?
4. What is known about Tychicus?

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

5. Who was Onesimus? Why was he accompanying Tychicus?

6. What is known about Aristarchus? How is it that the scriptures do not tell us more about this important associate of Paul?

7. What can we learn from Mark? How had Paul's attitude toward him changed over the years?

8. What was Epaphras' prayer for his fellow Colossians?

9. Why did the church meet in the house of Nympha? Was the "house-church" part of a divine blueprint for the church? What would be the advantages or disadvantages of meeting in "house-churches" today?

10. What do we know about the "letter from Laodicea"?

11. Why was "grace" always mentioned at the opening and the closing of Paul's letters?

12. What have you learned from this study of Colossians? How do you expect your life to be changed as a result?

PHILEMON

Lesson Thirteen (Philemon 1-25)

Personal Greetings (1-7)

1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our beloved fellow worker 2 and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints, 6 and I pray that the sharing of your faith may promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ. 7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

V.1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother – Paul wrote this personal note to Philemon from his first Roman imprisonment. During this same imprisonment, he also wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians. (See notes on Col. 1:2.) Verses one through five are virtually identical with Colossians, except for the persons addressed.

To Philemon our beloved fellow worker - Philemon was a Colossian, as can be seen by the fact that Onesimus was being returned to Colossae (Col. 4:9) and by the reference to Archippus (Col. 4:17; Philemon 2). He was a slave-holder (v. 15-16) and had a house large enough to serve as a meeting place for the church (v. 2). He had been converted to Christ through the ministry of the apostle Paul (v. 19), probably in Ephesus with his fellow Colossian, Epaphras (Col. 1:7). He was now a “fellow worker” in the kingdom.

V. 2 Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier – Since this letter to Philemon was strictly a personal letter, it is generally assumed that these two persons were members of Philemon’s household. Apphia is assumed to be his wife, since otherwise she would have been addressed after Archippus. Archippus, who held a position of some responsibility in the Colossian church (Col. 4:17), is assumed to be Philemon’s son.

V. 3 Grace to you and peace – This same greeting opens all of Paul’s epistles. (See the notes on Phil. 1:2 and Col. 1:2.)

V. 4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers —It must have given Paul great satisfaction to reflect on the spiritual progress of his many converts. Perhaps this was a part of his amazing ability to be content even in his imprisonment. What was true of Paul’s prayers for Philemon was true of his prayers for all the Colossians (Col. 1:3).

V. 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have – The good report about all the Colossian Christians (Col. 1:4) was true of Philemon individually. Paul had probably heard both reports from the same source—Epaphras (Col. 1:8).

toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints – Philemon’s love toward “all the saints” was about to be tested by one of the more recent “saints”—Onesimus, his runaway slave.

V. 6 and I pray that the sharing of your faith – The “sharing” of Philemon’s faith may have been his own participation in a life of faith or it may have been his communication of that faith to others. The two ideas are closely interrelated, anyway.

may promote the knowledge of the good that is ours in Christ – Literally, “may become actively energetic” in the knowledge of that good. A man’s participation in faith must not be something static, but dynamic and energetic. Faith must function (Gal. 5:6) or it is worthless (James 2:20, 26).

V. 7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love – Philemon’s compassionate care for the local saints brought Paul joy, even in far away Rome. It is not likely that Paul had received anything personally from Philemon. Just the knowledge that his convert was sharing the love of Christ made Paul rejoice.

my brother – Paul made a point of their close personal fellowship in the family of God. This was an important prelude to the difficult appeal of verse ten.

because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you – Literally, the “bowels” or “internal organs” of the saints. This word was used in the Greek language to describe the seat of man’s emotions. (See notes on Phil. 1:8.) Paul used the expression again in Philemon 12 and 20.

The word for “refreshed” was used to refer to rest and refreshment from the weariness of toil. Note the use of the same word in Matt. 11:28, Mark 6:31, and I Cor. 16:18.

ONE LESSON ON PHILEMON

A Personal Appeal (8-25)

8 *Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required,* 9 *yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an ambassador and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—* 10 *I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment.* 11 *(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.)* 12 *I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.* 13 *I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel;* 14 *but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will.*

15 *Perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back for ever,* 16 *no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.* 17 *So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.* 18 *If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.* 19 *I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.* 20 *Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.*

21 *Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.* 22 *At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping through your prayers to be granted to you.*

23 *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,* 24 *and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.*

25 *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

V. 8 Accordingly – Since you are known to be so good to God's people.

though I am bold enough in Christ to command you – Paul could have used the authority of his apostleship to command Philemon to grant his appeal. He would also have used the obligation Philemon had from his own conversion by Paul.

what is required – “What is your duty; what is fitting” as in Col. 1:18. His duty was to receive Onesimus as a brother.

V. 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you – Paul loved Philemon too much to force him to act against his will. Moreover, if Onesimus had been received back under duress, resentment and hostility would have smoldered for years.

I, Paul, an ambassador – The word should have been translated “an old man.” The translation “ambassador” is merely conjectural. According to Hippocrates, a man was called *presbutes* (as in this verse) from age forth-nine to fifty-six.

and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus – Paul referred five times in this brief letter to the fact of his imprisonment (v. 1, 9, 10, 13, 23).

Having appealed to Philemon as a prisoner, an old man, and a personal friend, Paul was now ready to ask Philemon to exercise his admirable compassion and love (v. 5 and 7) on Onesimus.

V. 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment – Paul's final appeal was as a father appealing for his son. Indeed, Onesimus was Paul's son in the faith, since Paul had brought him to life in Christ.

Why did Paul have to make such an elaborate appeal? The answer lies in the temper of the times. It would have been legally proper and culturally expected that Philemon should immediately have Onesimus put to death.

V. 11 Formerly he was useless to you – “Onesimus” was a common Greek name, especially among slaves, meaning “profitable” or “useful.” Paul took the meaning of Onesimus' name to make an important point. Previously the “profitable” slave was useless; now he would be very useful. The gospel had changed his life.

V. 12 I am sending him back to you – Legally, Onesimus was still a runaway slave. His conversion to Christianity did not change his legal standing in the eyes of Rome. As long as Onesimus stayed in Rome, he was a fugitive.

Moreover, in one sense, Onesimus was still property that belonged to Philemon. Philemon had bought him with his own money and suffered financial loss when Onesimus ran away. There is even a hint in v. 18 that Onesimus may also have stolen money from Philemon when he left.

Imagine what would have happened to Christianity and to the Roman Empire if all a slave had to do to obtain his freedom was to profess Christ!

my very heart – Literally, “my insides, my bowels” as in verses 7 and 20. When Onesimus meant this much to Paul, how could Philemon refuse him?

V. 13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf – Paul added just one more item to the growing list of reasons why Philemon was indebted to Paul. Paul could have kept Onesimus without even consulting Philemon. Onesimus—now a very good and conscientious

ONE LESSON ON PHILEMON

servant—could have served Paul in ways Philemon could not.

V. 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent – The rights of the legal owner had to be respected. Paul wanted to let Philemon give his own “judgment” or consent in the matter.

that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will – Philemon also had the right to make his own decision to be generous toward Onesimus. If he had been forced to receive the slave, he would have felt no satisfaction and received no blessing.

It is true that Paul made this appeal in such a way as to make it practically impossible for Philemon to refuse. At the same time, however, he left the final decision to Philemon. Thus, while strongly encouraged by Paul, it was still a matter of Philemon’s own free will.

V. 15 Perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while – Paul gently suggested that the whole affair might even have been a providential act of God. Instead of saying that Onesimus ran away, Paul said he “was parted from you.” Thus, instead of blaming Onesimus, Philemon should thank God.

V. 16 no longer as a slave – Philemon got Onesimus back forever, but not as a slave. It is true that Onesimus returned to serve Philemon as his slave, but now he would be more than a slave. He would be a brother.

Philemon was not asked to free Onesimus or return him to Rome. He was asked to accept as a brother the man he knew as a worthless criminal—and this was harder.

both in the flesh and in the Lord – In the mere physical sense, Onesimus would be a better servant; in the spiritual sense, he will belong to Philemon as a brother.

V. 17 If you consider me your partner – The appeal is now made on the basis of mutual participation in the kingdom of Christ. The word “partner” also implies intimate friendship.

receive him as myself – Since Onesimus was Paul’s very “heart” (v. 12), to receive him was to receive Paul himself.

V. 18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything – There is a hint in these words that Onesimus may have stolen money from his master. Whatever losses Philemon had suffered, Paul would repay. This would remove every possible obstacle between Philemon and his new brother.

V. 19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay – Even if the rest of this letter was written by an amanuensis (as Col. 4:18), this was written by Paul’s own hand. He was signing a promissory note.

to say nothing of your owing me even your own self – While they were on the subject of debts and obligations, Paul none too casually reminded Philemon of his own debt to Paul. Even if he forgave Onesimus and overlooked any financial losses, he still would not have paid all his obligation to Paul. Paul had led him to Christ and brought him eternal life!

V. 20 Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord – Paul used the word *oninasthai* for having “benefit,” making a direct play on the name Onesimus.

Refresh my heart in Christ – Just as Philemon had “given rest to the inward parts” of the saints (v. 7), now he was to do the same for Paul by receiving Onesimus as a brother.

V. 21 Confident of your obedience – Paul felt every confidence that Onesimus would do his Christian duty (v. 8). With Paul expressing such confidence, how could Philemon possibly let him down?

knowing that you will do even more than I say – This possibly meant that Philemon would even set Onesimus free.

V. 22 prepare a guest room for me – No doubt Paul truly expected to be released soon and hoped to enjoy the company of Philemon. Perhaps this is all that should be inferred from Paul’s statement.

At the same time, if Philemon had any thoughts at all about treating Onesimus harshly, he has now been forewarned that Paul would be coming soon in person to greet him and Onesimus.

V. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner – Since Epaphras was himself from Colossae (Col. 4:12), he had special reason to send greetings to Philemon. He, like Aristarchus (Col. 4:10), in some way shared in a special way in Paul’s imprisonment.

V. 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers – The same co-workers were named in Col. 4:10-14, where they sent greetings to all the church in Colossae. They were all interested in Onesimus and would be eagerly waiting to see what Philemon would do.

V. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit – As always, Paul closes with a mention of grace. If God had given his “unmerited favor” to Philemon, then surely Philemon should forgive “undeserving” Onesimus in return.

ONE LESSON ON PHILEMON

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. If Philemon was a Christian, why was he a slaveholder?
2. What are the known facts about Philemon?
3. What had Philemon done in verse seven to give Paul such joy and comfort?
4. How many different appeals or approaches did Paul use toward Philemon?
5. Why did Paul wait until verse 10 to finally get to the real point?
6. What does the name "Onesimus" mean? What is the play on words with this name in verse 11 and in verse 20?
7. Why did Paul try to *persuade* Philemon to do what was right? Why didn't he just tell him?
8. Why didn't Paul call for the total release of Onesimus? Shouldn't a slave who becomes a Christian go free?
9. What did Philemon owe to Paul?
10. Do you think Paul meant anything special in his request for a guest room? Was this a veiled threat?
11. What have you learned from the study of Philemon? Why was it included in the New Testament? Will it have any effect on your life?