

New Testament Survey #4

COLOSSIANS

1. Background

- Colossae was part of a tri-city area that included Hierapolis and Laodicea in the Lycus river valley about 100 miles from Ephesus.
- Paul had never visited Colossae at the time of his letter (2:1), yet he considered himself to have apostolic responsibility.

Epaphras, a Colossian native who had been saved in Ephesus, started the church in Colossae. The church was started during Paul's ministry in Ephesus, when for over two years all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10).

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras... Colossians 1:6, 7

- Paul had a number of close friends from Colossae: Philemon, Epaphras, Onesimo, among others. His relationships with these friends increased his love for all the believers in Colossae.
- False teachings that blended Christianity, Jewish ritualism, Greek philosophic speculation, and pagan mysticism were being propagated in Colossae.

Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. Colossians 2:16, 18

2. Purpose and Theme

- Paul's purpose was to expose the Colossian heresy and confront those who had fallen under its spell.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the

basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize... 2:8, 18

This amalgamation of teachings was supposed to bring wisdom and strengthen believers against temptation. But in reality, the wisdom they offered was false, their practices were worthless, and their teachings denied the supremacy of Christ.

- To achieve his purpose, Paul asserts the supremacy and all-sufficiency of Christ throughout the whole epistle.

And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. 1:17, 18

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 1:15

For by him all things were created...through him and for him. 1:16

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell... 1:19

...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 1:20

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. 1:27

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 3:1

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 3:4

...knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 3:24

- Legalism, man-made philosophies, strict diets, compulsory observances of holy days, discipline of the flesh—all of these go when Christ is given His place of preeminence.

PHILEMON: RECONCILIATION EXEMPLIFIED

1. Authorship and Addressee

- Paul wrote to Philemon during his first imprisonment in Rome. This letter was sent to Philemon at the same time that the letter to the Colossians was sent. Onesimus carried the letter accompanied by Tychicus.
- Philemon was an affluent leader of one of the house churches in Colossae. He was a convert of Paul's, although since Paul had never been to Colossae, he was probably converted in Ephesus.

Philemon 1:1, 2

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.

Apphia: and Archippus were members of his household.

2. Background

- Onesimus (name means "useful") was Philemon's slave who escaped with stolen money. He ended up in Rome, was converted by Paul, and began to minister to the apostle during his imprisonment.

...my child, Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment... Philemon 1:10

- Paul soon decided that even though Onesimus was very useful, he must send him back to Philemon. Onesimus returned with this letter.

Philemon 1:12-14

And I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but of your own free will.

3. Themes

- An important theme in Philemon is the proper use of authority.

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you... But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary... Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. Philemon 1:8, 9, 14, 21

- An underlying theme in Philemon is reconciliation. The whole epistle serves as an objective lesson on reconciliation. Philemon contains all the elements that need to be present for real reconciliation to happen: repentance, forgiveness, restitution, and accountability.

PHILIPPIANS: PAUL'S JOY AND CROWN

1. Authorship

- Paul wrote Philippians during his first imprisonment in Rome.
- Paul's authorship is clear throughout the whole letter; the first person pronoun is used around 100 times in this short letter.

2. Background

- Philippi was a Roman **colony** and the Gateway to the West. **The city of Philippi was a tollgate on main routes between Asia and Europe, an important bastion for the spread of the Gospel in the first century.**
- Colony: Rome transplanted to the provinces. The inhabitants were Roman citizens with voting rights and had their own senate with Roman law.
- Paul planted the church in Philippi around 50 AD, on his second missionary journey, after receiving a vision in the night from a man from Macedonian. Philippi was his first church-plant in **Europe**.
- Paul's ministry in Philippi was marked by supernatural interventions. **He first went to Philippi guided by a vision from God. After having preached in Philippi for a few weeks, Paul casted a demon out of a girl with a spirit of divination. While imprisoned for having cast out the demon, an earthquake opened the gates of the prison.**

- Paul's stay in Philippi was brief, but he established deep relationships that lasted throughout his life. They were his "partners in the Gospel."
- Paul left the city due to persecution. Internal evidence points to the possibility of Luke staying in Philippi to strengthen and organize the church.
- The Philippian church supported Paul financially more than any other church in the New Testament

And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once.

- Ten years after his first visit to Philippi, Paul is a prisoner in Rome. The Philippian church, hearing of his imprisonment, raised a contribution for him and sent it with Epaphroditus who was also commissioned to stay and minister to him.
- Sometime after delivering the offering, Epaphroditus became deadly sick. The church in Philippi heard of Epaphroditus's illness and was deeply concerned. When he recovered, Paul sent him back to Philippi to encourage the church and to deliver this letter.

3. Style

- Philippians is abrupt and filled with emotions. It is hard to follow its train of thought. Paul addresses several topics within the letter.
- The tone of the epistle is loving, joyful and thankful.
Philippians is unique in the Pauline literature: no remonstrance against sin, heresy, doctrinal controversy, leadership crises, or schism. It seems to have been a model church.

For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:8

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. Philippians 4:1

4. Purpose

- The primary reason for writing the letter is to send the Philippians a “thank you” note for their financial gift.
- Another purpose of Philippians is to comfort the church that was worried for Paul’s circumstances, Epaphroditus’s illness, and their own persecution.
- To circumvent any possible rivalries or **strife** (2:1-4, 4:2).
 - Paul points to Jesus as the ultimate example of humility and motivation for unity.
 - Apart from a brief exhortation at the beginning of chapter four, there is no remonstrance against any sin, schism, or heresy at Philippi. The Philippians truly were Paul’s joy and crown!

5. Themes and Structure

Three main themes run continuously throughout the letter:

- **Joy:** Joy is used in some form 19 times in this short letter; the very recurrence of the word joy points to the relevance joy has in Philippians.

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. (3:1)

- The person of **Jesus Christ**. (Each chapter highlights a different aspect of Christ.)

Philippians 2:6-11

...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- The **Gospel:** The word Gospel is used nine times.

Paul speaks of the partnership of the Gospel (1:5); confirmation of the Gospel (1:7); progress of the Gospel (1:12); acquaintance with the Gospel (1:15); defense of the Gospel (1:16); walk worthy of the Gospel (1:27); strive for the faith of the Gospel (1:27); work of the Gospel (2:22); cause of the Gospel (4:3).

The call to a walk worthy of the **Gospel of Jesus** gives unity to the epistle. It's the Gospel that makes it worthy to suffer, to give, to strive for unity, and rejoice in all of it.

PASTORAL EPISTLES

First Timothy, Second Timothy and Titus are grouped together and given the title of Pastoral Epistles, because they are addressed to individuals with pastoral oversight of churches. They have similar content and language, discussing issues of false teachers, sound doctrine, and church leadership.

1. Authorship

- All three letters claim Paul as their author. The self-testimony of Pauline authorship is found in the repeated references that Paul makes about himself throughout the body of each epistle.
- The Pastoral Epistles were written after the completion of Acts and refer to events after 62 AD and before Paul's martyrdom.

I TIMOTHY

1. Recipient

- Timothy was a native from Lystra. His mother was a Jewish believer and his father was a Greek and probably not a believer.
- Paul probably led Timothy to Christ on his first missionary journey. When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey he took Timothy with him (Acts 16:1, 3). Timothy was with Paul from this point on throughout most of his journeys. None of Paul's other companions were as close to his heart.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly... For I have no one else of kindred spirit... he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. (Philippians 2:19-22)

- Timothy was meek, diffident, and timid at times.

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. II Timothy 1:7, 8

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
II Timothy 2:1

2. Background

The historical background and chronology of I Timothy is not known with absolute certainty, but was probably something like this:

- Paul was acquitted before Caesar in 62 AD.
- Paul, Luke, and Timothy visited Ephesus and found that “wolves” had entered the church. Paul stayed in Ephesus for a season and then departed to Philippi, leaving Timothy in charge.

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines. (I Timothy 1:3)

- Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy after his first imprisonment and before his second imprisonment in Rome, between 64-66 AD.

I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write...

3. Purpose and Tone

- Paul wrote to Timothy in Ephesus to instruct Timothy on how to lead the church in his absence as he opposed false teachers in Ephesus.

I Timothy 3:15 is the thesis statement and key verse for this epistle.

I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

- Timothy had to command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.
- Timothy had to challenge hypocritical liars, whose consciences had been seared as with a hot iron.
- Timothy had to rebuke publicly those who were in sin.

- Paul's first letter to Timothy is personal, practical, and unsystematic in nature.

This letter is filled with encouragement for a youthful Christian worker who was facing many difficult problems in a "big city church."

TITUS – GOOD DEEDS AND SOUND DOCTRINE

Paul wrote to Titus after I Timothy and before II Timothy – between 62-66 AD.

1. Recipient

- Titus was a Greek believer (Gal. 2:3) who was probably won to Christ through Paul's ministry. (Titus 1:4)
- Titus was a vital member of Paul's apostolic team who functioned in several different roles.

As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. (2Corinthians 8:23)

2. Background

- The origin of the church in Crete is unknown, but it may have started when visiting Cretans, converted through the preaching of Peter at Pentecost, returned home. It is unknown when Paul became involved in the church at Crete.
- Judaizers had found their way to Crete and were teaching erroneous doctrine.

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain. (Titus 1:10, 11)

3. Purpose and Themes

- Paul wrote to Titus to instruct him on how to set the church in order. His instructions included the qualifications for elders, the proper behavior for different groups in the church, and the doctrine needed to confront the false teachers.

Titus 1:9

...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

- The great doctrinal theme in this letter is the relationship between grace and good works.

Paul insisted that grace produces the fruit of good deeds.

- This letter is filled with admonitions to good works.

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. (Titus 1:16)

These good works manifest in a lifestyle of obedience, purity, and self-control.

- This letter contains one of the great New Testament declarations of grace.

Titus 3:4-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age... (Titus 2:11-12)

II TIMOTHY – PAUL’S LAST WORDS

Paul wrote this letter between 65–66 AD before his martyrdom.

1. Background

- Two to three years may have elapsed between Paul’s release from his first imprisonment in Rome and his second imprisonment. He was probably arrested on a double charge; first, of being one of

the conspirers to set Rome on fire, 64 AD; secondly, of introducing an unlawful religion.

- Rome had been set on fire, presumably by Nero, in July 64 AD. Nero arrested, tortured and executed hundreds of Christians on the pretext that they had something to do with the fire
- Paul's second imprisonment was much harsher than the first one. Even his former companions are gone, and apart from Luke, he is alone.

II Timothy 1:15; 4:10, 11

You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me... Only Luke is with me.

The "some" of I Timothy (1:6) has become "all" in II Timothy (1:15).

- Second Timothy is the last of Paul's extant letters, written from a Roman prison as he awaited his execution.

II Timothy 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Second Timothy has the special weight typically given the last words of a dying man. Sometime after penning this letter, Paul was beheaded.

2. Purpose

- Paul's primary reason for writing was to urge Timothy to visit him expeditiously before his imminent execution.

II Timothy 1:4; 4:9, 21

Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. Do your best to come to me quickly. Do your best to get here before winter.

- However, Paul knew that Timothy might not make it in time. Therefore, his second reason for writing was to say some of the things that were the most important to him before he departed.

3. Themes

- The main theme of II Timothy comes out of the exhortations Paul gives to Timothy to hold fast, teach and defend the truth.
 - *Retain the standard of **sound words** which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you. (2 Timothy 1:13, 14)*
 - *And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to **teach** others also. (2 Timothy 2:2)*
 - **Preach the Word**; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction. (2 Timothy 4:2)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The influence of false teachings made it difficult for the Colossian believers to discern truth from error. What influences in your own culture make it hard to discern truth from error? How can Paul's focus on the supremacy of Christ guide our own strategy in dealing with error?
2. From your understanding of Titus, what is the relationship between the Grace of God and good works?
3. Considering the relationship of Paul and Timothy, and Paul's sense in II Timothy that his time to go with the Lord had come, how does the knowledge of the background affect the way we apply 2 Tim 1:13-14 in our own lives and ministries?

HOMEWORK:

In Philippians 1:12 Paul said, "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the Gospel." What were his circumstances? How did this lead to the greater progress of the Gospel?