



# Intro to the New Testament:

## *Prison Letters of Paul*

### Session Four

# Paul's Imprisonment

- We know of two imprisonments of Paul: one was in Caesarea under governors Felix and Festus found in Acts 23:23–26:32 and the second one was in Rome while Paul waited for his trial before Caesar in Acts 28:30–31
- Drawing on a small amount of church tradition some scholars have proposed a third imprisonment in Ephesus during Paul's ministry there
- The traditional view assigns all the Prison letters to Paul's Roman imprisonment, but the Caesarean and Ephesian locations must be kept in mind for each



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Philemon

# Philemon: Outline & Prospects

- Greeting (vv. 1–3)
  - Thanksgiving for Philemon (vv. 4–7)
  - Plea for Onesimus (vv. 8–22)
  - Greetings and Benediction (vv. 23–25)
- 
- Paul would like to keep Onesimus as a helper, so he maybe calling on Philemon, to free Onesimus to do so, but he may just be asking for the loan of him
  - However, his reference to the greater spiritual debt is an invitation for Philemon to cancel any debt

# Philemon: Background

- Onesimus stole money from his master and fled to Rome, possibly to seek Paul's help
- The apostle leads the runaway slave to faith in Jesus and convinces him that it is his Christian responsibility to return to his master in order to live up to his name which means profitable
- Paul sends Onesimus with a very tactful letter to persuade Philemon to take Onesimus back without punishment or putting him to death
- But Paul calls Philemon to go ever further and receive Onesimus as a beloved brother in the Lord



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Colossians

# Colossians

- It is written to a community that he did not found. Rather, Ephaphras who may have been a convert of Paul's at Ephesus, brought the gospel back to his home of Colosse
- There are many allusions to the non-Christian past of the readers, suggesting that most were Gentiles: once in idolatry and slaves to sin, hostile to God in mind and godless in action
- What we receive in this letter then is a Christian congregation that is obedient to the apostolic gospel and for which the apostle can give thanks; he knows of their love in the Spirit and was delighted to learn of their orderly Christian lives and stable faith

# Colossians: Outline

- Introduction (1:1–12)
  - Greeting (1:1–2)
  - Thanksgiving (1:3–8)
  - Prayer (1:9–12)
- Preeminence of Christ (1:13–2:23)
  - Christ’s creative and redemptive work (1:13–23)
  - Christ’s proclamation by Paul (1:24–25)
  - Christ’s sufficiency against heresy (2:6–23)
- Preeminence of Christ in Christian Conduct (3:1–4:6)
  - Union with Christ (3:1–4)
  - Application of death with Christ to sinful action (3:5–11)
  - Application of resurrection with Christ to righteous action (3:12–4:6)
- Conclusion (4:7–18)
  - Coming of Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7–9)
  - Greetings and final instructions (4:10-17)
  - Farewell and benediction (4:18)



# Colossians: Occasion & Heresy

- Epaphras has visited Paul and reported the progress of the gospel
- Much is encouraging, but there is also a report of false teaching that had been introduced to the congregation
- So, this letter is a response to this urgent need as Paul lends his greater wisdom as an apostle

## *Heresy*

- Based on 2:8 it seems the teaching was set out as a philosophy based on tradition which was supposed to impart true knowledge
- Paul seems to quote catchwords of the opponents as he attacks their teaching outlining taboos

# Colossians: Paul's Response

- As Paul moves into chapter 2 he points to the dangers facing the church, issuing a strong warning to them to be on their guard against being carried off as spoil
- These spiritual pirates are trying to ensnare them with their philosophy and empty deceit
- In making his response Paul here expounds the doctrine of the cosmic Christ more fully than in his earlier letters and is a warning against the false teachers who boasted in their exalted spiritual experiences, revelations, and claims of divine fulness—they are in danger of being separated from Christ



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Ephesians

# Ephesians: Authorship & Addresses

- Ephesians is unique as a letter by Paul
- It's worship language and prayer, the depth and scope of its theology, and practical admonitions have made it many Christians favourite book
- Present scholarship is divided as to whether Paul is the author of Ephesians which is ironic as many scholars have regarded Ephesians as the crown of Paul's thought

## *Addresses*

- There are textual and content features that call into question the churches in Ephesus as the recipients
- It maybe that Ephesians was or became a circular letter but there is growing<sup>12</sup> support that in Ephesus should remain

# Ephesians: Life Setting and Purpose

- Ephesians is the least situational letter of Paul; in it he is not addressing an urgent controversy
- This gives Ephesians a more meditative quality
- Based on all this we could say the purpose of Ephesians is a letter to new Gentile Christians who did not know Paul. He is writing to them to guide them in his gospel to counteract their Hellenistic background. Of particular concern was Christ's relationship to the powers of their past. As well, they were in need of guidance to develop a consistent Christian lifestyle. With the new influx of Gentile Christians, Paul needed to address some Jew-Gentile tensions.

# Ephesians: Outline

- Greeting (1:1–2)
  - Spiritual privileges of the Church (1:3–3:21)
    - Praise for spiritual blessings (1:3–14)
    - Thanksgiving and prayer for increased comprehension (1:15–23)
    - Regeneration of sinners by grace alone (2:1–10)
    - Reconciliation of Gentiles with God and with Jews in Church (2:11–22)
    - Paul’s privilege of proclaiming gospel (3:1–13)
    - Prayer for stability (3:14–19)
    - Doxology (3:20–21)
  - Spiritual responsibilities of the church (4:1–6:20)
    - Maintenance of unity (4:1–16)
    - Moral conduct (4:17–5:14)
    - Filling with the Spirit (5:15–21)
    - Code for Christians household (5:22–6:9)
    - Spiritual warfare (6:10–20)
- Conclusion (6:21–24)

# Ephesians: Themes

- The greatness of God
- The exalted Christ
- Salvation's present dimension
- The status of believers
- The unity of Jew and Gentile
- Struggle with the powers
- Ethical obligation of believers
- Apostle to the Gentiles
- The church



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Philippians



# Philippians: Purpose, Authorship, Opponents

- Paul writes Philippians as a thank you for their financial assistance
- He also speaks against their tendency towards divisiveness, to warn Judaizers, and to prepare for a visit from Timothy and by God's grace Paul

## Authorship

- While it comes from both Paul and Timothy, it is clear that the letter is coming from Paul himself emphasized with personal singular pronouns

## Opponents

- Paul's opponents in Philippi are not a single group, but several different groups
- One opposed Paul himself, preaching Christ to increase his suffering while in prison

# Philippians: Outline

## *Outline*

Greeting (1:1–2)

- I. Personal matters (1:3–26)
  - A. Paul's thanksgiving, prayer, and affection (1:3–11)
  - B. Paul's preaching in prison, potential release, and readiness to die (1:12–26)
- II. Exhortations (1:27–2:18)
  - A. To worthy conduct (1:27–30)
  - B. To unity (2:1–18)
- III. Sending of Timothy and Ephaphroditus (2:19–30)
- IV. Warning against Judaizers (3:1–21)
- V. Exhortations (4:1–9)
  - A. To unity (4:1–3)
  - B. To joy (4:4–7)
  - C. To nobility of thought (4:8–9)
- VI. Thanks for financial assistance (4:10–20)

Greetings and benediction (4:21–23)

# Philippians: Contents

1:1-2

- Paul begins his letter following convention and adapting it to his Christian audience

1:3–26

- Paul gives thanks for the Philippians
- Expresses constant prayer for them, as well as his affection and confidence in God concerning them
- He gives an account of his imprisonment and the positive effects it has
- He shares his confidence of his release and reuniting with them

# Philippians: Contents

1:27–2:18

- Paul pleads with them to live lives worthy of the gospel of Christ
- This means living in harmony with each other, striving for the faith of the gospel, being unafraid of the opponents of the gospel, willing to suffer for the gospel, eager to imitate Christ by seeking welfare of others with humility, carrying out responsibilities without murmuring, and remaining pure and holy and blameless children of God

2:19–3:1

- Paul lets them know his desire to send Timothy to them and until that can occur his intention to send back Epaphroditus (their messenger who risked his life to bring their gift)

# Philippians: Contents

## 3:2–21

- The tone changes and Paul begins a bitter attack on those who subvert the Philippians, asserting his own authority which is based on sacrifice rather than status
- His authority is based on Christ's own model

## 4:1–23

- Paul pleads for unity in the church, especially among leaders
- He gives advice for how Christians are to feel, think, and act
- Assuages any guilt they may have for not being able to send aid
- Gives thanks for their renewed generosity and closes by giving glory to God and greeting all

# Philippians: Theological Components

- Philippians Christ Hymn gives a magnificent picture of Jesus as preexistent, equal with God, becoming incarnate, a human being, a servant, totally obedient, exalted by God, the object of worship
- Additionally, Philippians calls us to work out our own salvation...for it is God who is at work in you
- Paul also elaborates in 3:8–16 that sanctification is an ever increasing apprehension of the surpassing worth of Jesus, allowing nothing to destroy or diminish it
- Lastly, joy runs throughout this letter; it is not a feeling but a settled state of mind characterized by peace