

Prison Letters of Paul

Contentment in Times of Trial



by Matt Dabbs
mattdabbs.wordpress.com

Schedule of Lessons

Philemon:

- Lesson 1 – Historical Backgrounds of Philemon
- Lesson 2 – Thankfulness for Other Christians – Phil 1:1-7
- Lesson 3 – Mending Broken Relationships – Phil 1:8-16
- Lesson 4 – Expecting the Best – Phil 1:17-25

Colossians:

- Lesson 5 – Introduction and Col 1:1-1:23
- Lesson 6 - Col 1:24-2:5
- Lesson 7 – Col 2:6-3:17
- Lesson 8 – Col 3:18-4:18

Ephesians:

- Lesson 9 – Introduction and Ch1
- Lesson 10 – Ephesians 2
- Lesson 11 – Eph 3
- Lesson 12 – Eph 4:1-5:20
- Lesson 13 – Eph 5:21-6:21

Philippians:

- Lesson 14 – Introduction and Ch1
- Lesson 15 – Phil 2
- Lesson 16 – Phil 3-4

Lesson 1 - Historical Backgrounds of Philemon

Information useful to understand before a study of the letter's contents

Paul's Prison Letters:

How did Paul get put in prison? You will have to read the end of Acts (chapters 21-28) to get the whole story. In Acts 21 we find Paul heading to Jerusalem and by the end of the chapter he is arrested. Some of the Jews believed he had brought Gentiles into the temple and caused a great uproar. They tried to kill him (21:31) but he was saved by some Roman soldiers. From there Paul was sent to trial with Felix (Acts 24) where he stayed in jail in Caesarea for two years. This is probably when he wrote Philemon and Colossians. After his appeal to Caesar he was transferred to Rome where he stood under house arrest for another two years. This is probably when he wrote Ephesians and Philippians. In our study we will study them in that order: Philemon, Colossians (Caesarea imprisonment) and Ephesians, Philippians (Roman imprisonment).

All four of the prison letters mention Paul's chains:

1. Philemon 10, 13 – in chains for the Gospel
2. Colossians – 4:3, 18 – he is in chains for the Gospel
3. Ephesians 6:20 – ambassador in chains
4. Philippians 1:7, 13, 14, 17 – in chains for the Gospel

Ultimately Paul was executed in Rome after a trial before the supreme court of Rome.

Slavery in the Greco-Roman World:

One of the most important things to understand about Philemon is the background of slavery in the ancient world. Once we have an informed understanding of slavery in the ancient world we will be able to make better sense out of what Paul is writing to Philemon regarding his slave and Christian brother Onesimus.

What do you typically think of slavery being like?

One of the first things we have to overcome is to understand the differences between slavery in America and slavery in the ancient world. The two are quite different. Here is how Scott Bartchy explains it,

“knowledge of slavery as practiced in the New World in the 17th-19th centuries has hindered more than helped achieving an appropriate, historical understanding of social-economic life in the Mediterranean world of the 1st century, knowledge of which is absolutely essential for a sound [interpretation] of those NT texts dealing with slaves and their owners.”¹

In the ancient world slaves were viewed as property. People could actually sell themselves into slavery. That doesn't make sense from a 19th century American slavery point of view. But their system was different. You could sell yourself into slavery to advance your family through the eventual gaining of Roman citizenship which had some great benefits in the long run. This is because slaves in the ancient world could buy their way back out of slavery with a new status. They would even purchase slaves for themselves while slaves themselves and earn wages. Slaves could come from any conceivable background. Some slaves were doctors, philosophers, and government officials. For some, slave life was voluntary. If a person wanted Roman citizenship, they could become a slave to a Roman and when they

¹ S. Scott Bartchy, Anchor Bible Dictionary, vol. 6, “Slavery (Greco-Roman)”, ed. David Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 67.

purchased their way out or were released from their obligation (called manumission) gain Roman citizenship. Slavery was not a racial matter. It was a means to get manual labor done.²

Are any of these aspects of ancient slavery surprising to you? Which ones?

That sheds a lot of light on the letter to Philemon. Once we get out of our minds the 19th century stereotypes of American slavery and get a proper understanding of slavery in their world things begin to make more sense. It answers questions like, “Why wouldn’t Paul tell them to free all their slaves?” Because it wasn’t typically a cruel and abusive system, instead it was often used to advance the status of the slaves who were able to purchase themselves out of slavery and even then gain status as Roman citizens. It also casts Philemon in a better light. He was not some cruel slave master, rather, he was a loving brother in Christ who undoubtedly treated his slaves with care and compassion.

How does the view of slavery above help put to rest how contradictory it seems for Paul to not command Philemon to release his slaves as the Christian thing to do?

- Although Paul may be hinting to Philemon that he ought to release him in vs. 15-17

The Reason Paul and Onesimus Connect:

Philemon is one of Paul’s prison letters. What is the chance that a slave of one of Paul’s friends would end up with him in prison from such a great distance? It had to be intentional. Onesimus is not a prisoner. He is presumably a slave on the run. But notice that Paul assumes he can go back to Philemon. In the Roman world a runaway slave had to be reported if they were found. But it was customary that slave could run away if they had gotten in trouble and went to seek a friend of their master to make intercession for them to reconcile the situation. So chances are Onesimus set out to find Paul and Paul writes the customary letter back to Philemon asking them to be reconciled and to set things right. That is the letter we have in front of us when we read Philemon. So Onesimus is not running to free himself from slavery but seeking out Paul to bring reconciliation with Philemon so he can return in peace.

Last, people have assumed Onesimus had stolen money or possessions from Philemon because Paul promises to pay back any damages (Phil 1:18-19). It is entirely possible that Paul is offering to pay work not completed in Onesimus’ absence.

Have you ever had to appeal to a mutual friend in order to bring about reconciliation in a difficult manner? What was the result?

Learning to Read a New Testament Letter – Format of Ancient Letters

Philemon is a perfect example of what ancient letters were typically like in the Greco-Roman world. Gordon Fee in his book How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth lays out the form of ancient letters as follows with examples from Philemon added:

Activity – Read the parts of the letter (identified by the numbers below) and let them identify it in Philemon

² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Letter to Philemon, The Anchor Bible, vol. 34C (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 25-28.

1. Name of the writers
 1. **“Paul**, a prisoner of Jesus Christ and **Timothy** our brother” (1:1)
2. Name of the recipient
 1. **“To Philemon** our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:” (1:1)
3. Greeting
 1. **“Grace and peace to you** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2)
4. Prayer wish or thanksgiving
 1. **“⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.”** – (1:4-7)
5. Body of the letter
 1. Philemon 1:8-22
6. Final greeting and farewell
 1. **“²³Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. ²⁴And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.**

Philemon is actually the average length of ancient letters. The letters Paul writes like Romans and Corinthians are extremely long for ancient letters. Hopefully with these three things being understood from the beginning we will be able to understand Philemon in a way corresponding to Paul’s intended purpose.

Activity - Read Philemon & Identify as a group the times Paul refers to the following:

Love

- Vs 5, 7, 9

How we view and value others

- Paul’s view of Philemon
 - Thankful – 4
 - Partnership in the faith – 6, 17
 - A brother – 7, 20
 - Respectful of his wishes - 14
- Paul’s view of Onesimus
 - A son – 10
 - Useful to both Paul and Philemon - 11
 - A brother – 16
 - Dear to Paul and Philemon - 16

God’s plan and timing

- Vs 15 – the reason he was gone might be for a greater purpose
- That purpose will change the roles Philemon and Onesimus see in each other

How does the letter of Philemon challenge you to see all people as important regardless of status?

Is there anyone you need to be reconciled to? How will you go about it?

Lesson 2 - Philemon 1:1-7

Thankfulness for Other Christians

Read the entire letter of Philemon to start the lesson

First we notice that Paul is in prison. Philemon is one of four letters Paul wrote from prison.

Can anyone name the other three of Paul's prison letters?

- Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

Colossians has some interesting overlaps with Philemon:

- Both are introduced as coming from both Paul and Timothy.
- Both introduce Paul as a prisoner (Philemon 1:1, Col 4:3).
- Both mention Onesimus and Archipus (Philemon 1:1:2, Col 4:9, 17).
- In the final greetings section of both letters, 5 out of 6 of the people mentioned are in both Philemon and Colossians. So we would probably be correct to assume that Philemon lives in Colossae.

In 1:2 we notice that Philemon is probably the head of a house church in Colossae. The early church didn't meet in large auditoriums. They met in homes and were probably congregations of 50 or less scattered throughout the city.

What advantages have you seen of worship and Bible study in a smaller in-home group versus Sunday morning in the auditorium?

What disadvantages are there?

Greeting:

In 1:3 Paul writes, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." *When you read through Philemon were there any things Paul wrote that could bring you grace and peace just as he intended Philemon to experience it?*

Thanksgiving section:

Next we find the thanksgiving and prayer section. It sounds like Paul prays specifically for Philemon, by name, and on regular occasions. **Part of expressing our thankfulness for others is praying for them regularly.**

- *Do you agree with that last statement? Why/Why not?*
- *Who do you find yourself praying for on a regular basis?*
- *Are there any commonalities among the people you pray for regularly? (all family, all close friends?)*

In verse 6 *What benefit does he pray for Philemon to experience?*

We often pray for people to be healthy and well. We pray for those lost spiritually to be found. Maybe there is a place in our prayer life we need to practice praying for the spiritual growth, maturity and well

being of other Christians as Paul does for Philemon. Notice Paul says Christians are in a **partnership** with each other. We are in this together, on the same page, trying to accomplish the same things.

In what ways have you seen other Christians as partners in our purpose as Christians?

It makes sense that the more we share or tell something to others, the better, richer and deeper understanding we will personally have regarding what we share. *You might have thought Paul would have told him to “share the Gospel” but instead what does he tell him to share? What is the difference/is there a difference?*

It is important as Christians to be thankful for each other and to express that thankfulness in words like Paul did through writing this letter but also through action like the prayers Paul delivered up on Philemon’s behalf to God.

Application:

What does Paul say Philemon has done that has given him great joy?

How might you go about “refreshing the hearts of the saints” today?

How does love work to refresh peoples’ hearts? How might we show love to others and do the same as Philemon?

Activity – Letter writing:

- Write a letter in group to another Christian at Northwest that has the same tone and thankfulness for them as Paul expresses for Philemon in vs 4-7
- Cards and stamps will be provided in advance of this lesson.
- When finished, have your group members address and stamp the cards
- Mail these by Wednesday. If you are unable just delegate this to someone in the group who can and give them the completed cards in group.

Lesson 3 - Philemon 1:8-16

Mending Broken Relationships

Philemon needs the “want to”

Paul starts off with a pretty strong appeal. *Who is Paul appealing for and why?*

Paul wants Philemon to make this decision for himself and not something done because Paul twists his arm.

Why do you think Paul wants Philemon to want to make this right rather than doing it out of obligation?

- Paul wants this experience to grow Philemon’s heart and faith as well

Paul wants Philemon to do this out of love and not out of obligation...and yet Paul is certainly doing some arm twisting in this letter! Paul is making a big appeal here. Something like... “I am old...you wouldn’t want to spite an old man would you? Onesimus is like a son to me...surely you would take back someone I consider a son. I have the right to order you but I wouldn’t do that! No...instead do it because you are supposed to love others.”

How can we become so bitter toward someone else that we no longer have the “Want to”? The want to make things right.

How does an appeal to loving the other person instill back in our hearts the “Want to”?

Why mend broken relationships?

Why is Paul so interested in making this situation right? Why all the pressure? Paul realizes that healthy Christian relationships are relationships that recognize unity in Christ, common identity and purpose. To see these two brothers at odds with each other who are both brothers in Christ seems heart breaking to Paul. When we see it or experience the same in our lives it should get our attention as well.

Have you ever experienced a difficult relationship with another Christian? If it was reconciled without naming names, how did it work out?

Seeing others as useful even when it doesn’t appear that way:

Your Bible probably has a footnote by Onesimus’ name...*What does it say his name means in Greek?* Notice the play on words Paul uses with that in verse 11. It was important for Philemon to start seeing Onesimus as useful again.

What things does Paul say to remind Philemon just how useful Onesimus has become? (10-16)

- He is like a son to Paul - 10
- Useful to both Paul and Philemon - 11
- He is Paul’s very heart – 12
- He is helping Paul in his chains – 13
- He is a dear brother and fellow man – 16

Paul is honoring Onesimus and raising his status in the eyes of Philemon in an effort to encourage Philemon to take him back and reconcile this broken relationship.

In verse 16 Paul brings it all into perspective. While Onesimus is a slave the reality is something much bigger and more important than that...*What does Paul mention about Onesimus in verse 16 that will basically force Philemon to do the right thing?*

This is key in us rekindling the desire to reconcile our own broken relationships. It is easy to view people we don't like as less valuable. *How do we rationalize our attempts to devalue those who treat us poorly or hurt us?*

The point Paul made to Philemon is that Paul had a special relationship with him and that Paul had the same special relationship with Onesimus. All people are lovable and important to God regardless of what our society tells us others are worth. If we are going to mend our own broken relationships several things have to happen that Paul teaches us through his letter to Philemon:

1. We do all things through the lens of love – vs. 9
2. Everyone is valuable and special to someone else and that should make them valuable to us as well.
3. We have to view people from a godly perspective. Other Christians, even ones we don't get along with are our brothers and sisters in Christ and we make every effort to make things right in our relationships with others.

The take home point in these verses for us is about reconciliation toward those who have done us wrong.

Application

Are there people in your life whom you have never forgiven or "taken back"? If so, why?

How do Paul's words in this letter remind you just how important it is to not hold things against people?

How can we, like Paul, still see people who have messed up as "dear to us" again?

Lesson 4 - Philemon 1:17-25

Expecting the Best

Paul concludes his letter with high expectations for Philemon. But really all he is doing is expecting him to do the right thing. Before we go any further in the letter have a look back at vs16. *Do you think Paul is inferring here that Philemon ultimately should let Onesimus go free?*

A case could be made that if Philemon saw him no longer as a slave but as a brother that he should then elevate him above the status as a slave.

1:17 begins Paul's last plea for Philemon to do the right thing. Paul expects the best from Philemon because he knows Philemon is a good, loving man and has been a partner in sharing the gospel with others. You would hope the leader of a house church and Christian community in the city of Colossae would listen to the apostle Paul!

Have you ever stood up for someone or stepped into a situation to try to make things right? What happened and what did you learn from it?

What potential barrier or roadblock does Paul attempt to alleviate in the reconciliation of Philemon and Onesimus in vs 19?

- Paul removes the financial hurdle that Philemon is left with.
- Philemon has lost time and the work Onesimus would have accomplished in the time he has been gone.

What obstacles to reconciliation can we face today?

What excuses can we make to leave relationships broken rather than try to fix them?

Fixing relationships often means making a sacrifice. We may "lose" something in the process. But Paul's point is, a renewed and whole relationship is worth far more than the price paid to achieve it.

It sounds like Paul converted both Philemon (1:19) and Onesimus (1:10). That gives Paul a very special relationship with both of them and makes him the perfect person to help make this situation right again. *Do you think you have played a pivotal role in certain relationships in your life? How can God use you to bring a godly influence on the people and relationships around you?*

If all that wasn't enough Paul concludes with more words about what Philemon ought to do and his confidence Philemon will do the right thing. It sounds like Paul really knows Philemon. He knows him well enough to know just how far to push the envelope with him to make things right. What is interesting is usually we think of the person who messes up as the one who needs to make it right. But here Paul is stressing the one who has been wronged, Philemon, as the one who needs to take steps to make this right.

Why is it difficult to take the first step toward mending a broken relationship when you were the one wronged? So Paul first overcomes the financial barrier. Then he overcomes the "he hit me first" mentality for Philemon. Last he is going to put them both on equal footing.

Socially Philemon had superior social status to Onesimus. However, Paul reminds them both that they are brothers in the matter...far more than master and slave. It is important for us all to remember that while by earthly standards people in certain positions are treated in certain ways that is not true in Christ. We treat

everyone the same and don't elevate some and devalue others. All are equal valuable in Christ's eyes and so they are to us as well.

1:22 - One last little shot by Paul...oh yeah, I intend to visit you soon too. In other words, if you don't work this out I will know about it when I get there!

1:23 – *Why does grace play a key role in all that is going on in this book? How do you need to have more grace for those around you?*

Sometimes we only act as big or as small as the expectations people have for us. Here, Paul hopes big things of Philemon. Maybe it is time we raised our own expectations of our lives in Christ with the understanding that even at our best it will never be good enough to earn the love God already has for each and every one of us.

Application

What are the biggest roadblocks in your life to making things right with others?

Which of these lessons from Philemon would help you overcome that?

Who did you relate with the most in this letter: Paul, Philemon, or Onesimus? Why?

Activity – Prayer time

Conclude in prayer for reconciliations of our relationships in Christ and for those outside the church as well.

Pray that God would use us as agents to mend broken relationships and patch up disunity in the body of Christ.

Lesson 5 – Colossians Introduction & 1:1-23

Background

Colossians is one of two letters written by Paul from prison around 60 AD in Caesarea before he was shipped to Rome. The other letter being Philemon. **Col 4:9** seems to say these two letters may have been sent at the same time from Paul in prison back to the churches in Colossae. In this letter Paul writes to people who are first generation Christians. The Christians in Colossae were pagans who were converted by the Gospel through Paul's preaching in Ephesus.

Learning to Read a New Testament Letter - Occasion

Why is it important that we understand the circumstances of Paul writing any of his letters?

- If we are going to understand what Paul is talking about in the letter we need to understand why he wrote it
- This also helps us hear the letter more like the original recipients heard it. When we understand what difficulties they were facing we understand how the letter would have been helpful to them.
- Paul doesn't usually write, "This is why I am writing this letter". You have to read the letter to see what Paul addresses in order to see why Paul wrote it.
- When you read Colossians, especially Col 2, it seems Colossians was written to combat doctrinal error that is starting to creep into the house churches of Colossae.

What error was Paul writing to address?

- The Jews believed angels were involved in giving the law (Gal 3:19 for instance). It seems false teachers had come in and said that it was necessary to please these angels, principalities and powers if God was to hear their prayers (see 2:16-23). In order to please them they were taught to follow strict dietary (2:21) and holiness guidelines as well as the observance of special days (2:16). Paul is teaching them that such teachings are false and that Christ is still supreme with full authority over everything in creation that they don't need to lean on such hollow and deceptive teachings (1:15ff, 2:8).

Colossians 1:1-23

The Work of Jesus Christ in You

Before addressing their specific concerns and needs Paul lets them know how much he cares for them.

What are four kind things Paul says about them in 1:1-1:8?

1. Heard of their **faith** (v.4)
2. Heard of their **love** for God's people (v.4)
3. They have **hope** (b)
4. The Gospel is **bearing fruit** in them (v.6)

Notice Paul's desire and prayers for them in 1:9-13. *What does Paul pray for them in these verses?*

- God to fill them with knowledge of his will, To live a life worthy of the Lord, To please the Lord in every way, To bear fruit in every good work, To grow in the knowledge of God, To be strengthened with all power, To have great endurance and patience, To give joyful thanks to God

We often get blinded by praying for people's physical needs and leave out praying for people to grow and mature spiritually and in their faith and knowledge of God.

Have you ever prayed for any of these things for another Christian? What prompted you to do that?

Keeping in mind that fact that these Christians are combating some false teaching, notice just how relevant Paul's prayer for them is. For example:

- They need knowledge of God and His will to be guided by truth rather than lies
- They need strength, patience and endurance in order to fight the good fight and withstand false teaching

What makes a prayer relevant?

How can we be lulled into prayer routine prayers that can lack relevance?

In **1:12-14** Paul talks about what God the Father has done on behalf of the Colossian Christians and all Christians – even us. *What does Paul say God the Father has done for us in 1:12-14?*

- Qualified us to share in his inheritance (**v.12**)
- Rescued us from darkness (**v.13**)
- Brought us into the kingdom of the Son (**v.13**)
- Redeemed us and forgave our sins (**v.14**)

Before Paul can talk about the untruth of false doctrine, it is important that he spends some time reminding them of the heart and soul of the real Gospel. In the remaining verses of chapter 1.

The Work of Jesus Christ in You (1:15-23):

In each of the things Paul reminds them about Christ he is showing the supremacy of Christ over everything. The reason he does this is to show them that the false teaching of pleasing angels pales in comparison to the greatness and authority of Christ.

1. Of which angel can you say they are the very image of God or that they are firstborn of all creation?
2. The angels didn't take any part in the work of creation. Christ created all things. Therefore he has authority over all things.
3. Notice again in **1:18** – Jesus Christ has supremacy over everything.

Why is it important that Jesus have supremacy over all things, even death (1:18)?

- It shows he has the power to save us from our sins.
- If someone or something had more authority than Christ then Jesus, God and their kingdom could be overthrown. But that is impossible.
- Because Christ has authority over death we believe his promise to raise us from the dead.

1:20 – *What does the word reconciliation mean?*

- When you reconcile your checkbook or account you balance it out. All debts must be paid and everything accounted for.
- *How is sin a debt and how did Jesus pay for that debt for us (1:20)?*
 - **See Rom 6:23**
 - When we sin we deserve the death sentence but through the blood of Christ the price was paid for our forgiveness (**1:20**).

So Jesus is not only supreme in his being, who he is. He is also supreme in what he accomplished in his time on earth. He not only taught the truth and healed the sick. He shed his blood to bring forgiveness and reconciliation to the whole world.

In the last three verses (**1:21-23**) of the section we are studying Paul tells us more about how the reconciliation he mentioned in 1:19 really works.

First, there is our situation. *How Does Paul describe the Colossian Christians before they became Christians? Have you ever been in that boat?*

- Alienated, enemies and evil people
- *What does Paul say caused their alienation from God?*
 - Their evil behavior and acting as enemies to God
- *Do we really view non-Christians as alienated from God even if they still seem like “nice people”?*
How do these verses inform us on how we see those who don’t believe in Jesus as Lord?

Next, he talks about what Christ has done for us while we were in that situation of being lost. *What does he say Christ did for us?*

But he says, this reconciliation takes place not just because Christ did that but only if we continue in our faith (**1:23**)

In other words, our reconciliation is done by the work of Christ but is only available through continuing in our faith.

Application:

When do you find your faith growing the most? Is that always an enjoyable experience?

How can appreciation of where God has brought us from (alienation and enemies) to where we are now (reconciled as God’s children) help strengthen our faith moving forward?

How does knowing Christ is superior and has more authority than any and every power in all creation give you courage to live a godly life regardless of the obstacles the world throws at you?

Lesson 6 – Colossians 1:24-2:5

Paul's Mission in Colossae

Read 1:24-2:5

Notice back in **1:23**, *What did Paul call himself?*

Would you consider yourself a servant of the Gospel?

How do we serve the Gospel?

In the verses we are studying today we learn more about what Paul believed that meant and how he lived that out for the benefit of the Colossian Christians.

First, servants are known to suffer at times:

Servants suffer because servants do what they are told to do. They don't call the shots. They listen and obey. That sounds harsh but we have to remember all that Paul just taught us about Christ in the first chapter. *What did we learn about Christ last week that makes him easy to follow and serve?*

- He has all power and authority (**1:15-18**)
- He contains the fullness of God (**1:19**)
- He brought reconciliation and life to lifeless sinners, that's us (**1:20-22**)
- We are now free from accusation (**1:22**)

Jesus Christ has two qualities that we don't often see side-by-side in our world. He has all power and he is merciful. *Why is it difficult for mankind to see those two qualities together?*

Who does Paul believe he is suffering for? (1:24)

We hear people talk about suffering for Christ but rarely do we hear people talk about suffering for the church. Paul is physically in chains because he was trying to advance the Gospel and reach the lost. *How do you think people suffer for the church today?*

Notice that Paul's suffering brings him great joy (**1:24**). Compare this to **James 1:2-4**. Paul gives us another spin off of suffering producing joy. Here, Paul's suffering not only makes *him* more mature in his faith but he is suffering to make *them* more mature in their faith (**1:28**).

What things are you willing to suffer for?

When have you suffered for something? Did it help you mature in some way?

Second, Paul understands that servants have responsibilities:

What did Paul say God commissioned him to do?

How seriously did Paul take his commission from God (see **1:29-2:1**)?

- God had him share the Gospel with the Gentiles. Paul did so even to the point of his own suffering and imprisonment.
- *What makes some Christians "strenuously contend" to do what God asks and others don't seem to want to be bothered with responsibility?*

Before we think it all depends on us who is Paul leaning on to make this happen (1:29)?

Third, Paul realizes just what his master has entrusted him with:

It is important for servants to realize what their master values. In **1:25** Paul tells us what God entrusted him with.

What is that?

- “the word of God” = Gospel

What did God ask him to do with it?

- Share it with the Gentiles

*What did Paul call the Gospel in **1:26, 27**?*

- A mystery
- Glorious riches

Mystery (1:26-27)- Paul has been entrusted by God with something very special. First it was a mystery. It could only be revealed by God. We couldn't figure it out on our own. Even the disciples who were with Christ 24/7 were confused at times and Christ had to reveal God's plan to them and make known the Gospel. Today, the Gospel doesn't feel like a mystery because many of us are 10th generation Christians who grew up in Sunday school. *How might the Gospel have at first seemed more like a mystery to those in Colossae than to many of us today?*

- They were first generation Christians. This was news to them. They had never heard of Jesus until Paul preached to them about the death, burial, and resurrection and how God was reconciling the world to himself (**1:20**)

Glorious riches (1:27, 2:2-3) – This was not some small mundane mystery. Look back at **Col 1:12**. *What word related to riches do you find there?*

How is the benefit and blessing of receiving the Gospel and becoming a Christian “glorious riches”?

There is nothing more valuable in the world than Jesus Christ and what he purchased with his own blood was a bunch of people dead in sin. Paul is reminding them of this so that they will recognize that what the false teachers have to offer pales in comparison to the glorious riches found in Christ (**see 2:4-5**)

If you are a Christian you are very wealthy in the most important ways imaginable.

Application:

What do you think God wants you to strenuously contend for?

What would it take for you to start doing that?

How do we still depend on God for strength today? Or do we?

How can we give our God-given mission our best effort while fully depending on God to make it happen?

Lesson 7 – Colossians 2:6-3:17

Life in Christ

Read 2:6-2:15

In 2:4 and 2:8 Paul refers to the possible danger of them being deceived by false teaching. In this section Paul is going to set them straight on the truth about Christ and in doing so, combat the false teachings they were facing.

Since we aren't dealing with the same false teaching today this lesson will focus on why false teaching is dangerous and what we can learn from Paul's teaching about the sufficiency of Christ from this passage.

The Danger of False Teaching:

There are false teachings today that are just as dangerous as what they faced in the first century. Paul teaches us several things that help us know what is true and what is false teaching:

1. False teachings can take you captive (2:8)

- a. Paul literally warns them not to let the false teachings "kidnap" them
- b. Things like the "health and wealth gospel" makes claims they can't deliver on.
- c. *How is someone "taken captive" by these types of teaching?*
 - i. They claim to have benefit, draw you closer to God, or have a special spiritual meaning but often distract us from the importance of Christ.

2. The sufficiency of Christ (2:9-10)

- a. Paul's answer to false teaching is the sufficiency of Christ. The Gospel doesn't need anything added to it or taken away from it. Jesus Christ and his death, burial, and resurrection is enough.
- b. *What does Paul say about Christ in 2:9-10?*
 - i. 2:9 - Christ is complete and fully divine
 - ii. 2:10 – He is head over every power and authority

3. What Christ has Done for us

- a. *What does Paul say Christ has done for us in 2:11-15?*
 - i. Circumcised out our sinful nature/fleshly desires (2:11)
 - ii. Raised us to walk a new life through baptism (2:12)
 - iii. Made us alive (2:13)
 - iv. Cancelled all that stood against us (2:14)
 - v. Disarmed all powers and authorities and gained victory over the powers that opposed us (2:15)
- b. *Why is this important? – Paul is telling us to enjoy the blessing we have found in Christ and that what he has already done is enough.*

In **2:16-23** Paul talks about some specifics of the false teaching they were facing. We don't face the same false teaching today but there is still something to learn from these verses. See especially **2:20**.

- As Christians we have also died to the world and sin in order to belong to Christ.
- *What struggles do Christians face today to be like the world...worse, act like we still belong to the world?*
- *What blessing comes from belonging to the world? - None. In fact, Paul says that way of life is "destined to perish" (2:22)*

Colossians 3:1-17

Chapter three starts Paul's "Application section" of the letter. Since all he has said to this point is true, here is how we are to live in light of these teachings.

What does it mean to set your heart and your mind on things above? (3:1-2)

- We make our priorities line up with God's
- We realize that this world is wasting away but through Christ we have true life

How would setting our heart in this position change our priorities?

Paul tells them how to set their hearts right in 3:5-17. **Name some of the 10 things he tells them to do or not to do in these verses (3:5-17):**

- Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, etc (3:5)
- Rid yourself of all such things as these: anger, rage, etc (3:8)
- Do not lie to each other (3:9)
- Take off the old & put on the new (3:9-10)
- Clothe yourself with: compassion, kindness, humility, etc (3:12)
- Bear with each other and forgive (3:13)
- Put on love (3:14)
- Let Christ's peace rule your heart (3:15) – *What does that mean?*
- Let Christ's word dwell in you (3:16)
- Do everything in the name of the Lord (3:17)

Application:

So Paul gives them a "to do" list and a "things not to do" list. It is important we know both what God expects of us as well as what he does not want us to do.

How would your life be different this week if you took this list seriously?

Would you be happier or more at peace if you did?

How can our sinful desires keep our from engaging in these things Paul encourages them to do?

Lesson 8 – Colossians 3:18-4:18

Practical Encouragements

Read 3:18-4:1

The “Household Code” is a name given to this part of a letter where the author would give specific instructions to members of his household or people under his authority. Paul uses this in Colossians, Ephesians, and Titus. You also see this in 1 Peter.

Two things jump out in his rules for Christian households:

1. In pagan letters you would often find rules for slaves, children, and wives. Paul gives rules for the men as well as both fathers and husbands.
2. Paul is not just interested in how they treat each other “at church” (assembled) but also at home, behind closed doors.

Wives/husbands:

Wives are told to submit to their husbands and husbands are told to love their wives.

- *How do these things go hand in hand?*
- *What happens if only one of them cares to do their part?*
- *Have you ever found your role challenging?*
- *Why does it make it easier if the other person does their part?*

Children/parents:

Children are told to be obedient and parents are told to not embitter their children.

- *What does it mean to embitter a child?*
- *How do these two things work together to make a healthy parent-child relationship?*

Slaves/masters:

If you think back to Philemon and what slavery was like in their day this is far easier to understand and eliminates some of our objections to the thought of Christians owning slaves and Paul accepting it among Christians.

- *If you were a slave, wouldn't it be easy to rationalize slacking since your situation might not be ideal?*
- *What does Paul remind them of so that they will work hard and do right?*
- *What does this have to teach us about the work we do today?*
- *Do you think what Paul says to the slaves' masters would be applicable to Christians who manage people and are over a large number of employees today?*

Read 4:2-18

What additional instructions does Paul give in 4:2-6?

- Generally - Devoted prayer, watchful and thankful
- Specifically – pray that God may open the door for their message (the Gospel) and that Paul proclaims it very clearly
- Act wisely toward the world – this sounds like an evangelistic lifestyle.
- *How can our speech help or hinder what the world thinks about Christians?*
- *Do you pray more for specific things or are your prayers more general? We should find room for both.*

In the last verses of Colossians we learn several things:

- That Paul is surrounded by Christians, even in jail, who are there to encourage him and promote the Gospel including many we know from other places in scripture:
 - Onesimus who is from Colossae (4:9)
 - John Mark – author of the Gospel of Mark

- Luke – author of the Gospel of Luke
- Barnabas from Acts
- Epaphras is a prayer warrior who prays for the church in Colossae regularly and with great fervor.
- *Have you ever prayed for a church hundreds or even thousands of miles from where you live? Have you kept our church in Germany in the Carrolls in your prayers on a consistent basis?*
- We see that this letter is “encyclical”, which means it was meant to be read at several churches.
- We also learn that Paul wrote a letter to the church at Laodicea (4:16) that is no longer in existence.

Application:

How well have you fulfilled your role in your household as determined by Paul’s household code here in Colossians?

What are you or could you be a prayer warrior for?

What does the world think about God and Christ based on what you have shown them by your example?

This is the final lesson on Colossians. *What has impacted you studying Colossians that will affect your faith, actions, or attitude?*

Lesson 9 - Introduction to Ephesians & Chapter 1

The Extent of God's Love and Power

Ephesus:

Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman empire (Population 250,000) in what is today the country of Turkey. In Acts 19 we read about Paul's trip to Ephesus and how the city was full of idolatry, especially the worship of Artemis. Ephesus was also famous for magic and sorcery (see Acts 19:19). These are important pieces of information because it helps us to relate to what Christians in Ephesus were dealing with and the pressures they faced from society.

This background helps shed light on verses like Ephesians 6:12-13 that says,

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the **powers of this dark world** and against the **spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms**.

¹³Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

These verses make more sense when you realize Ephesus was famous for witchcraft and idolatry.

Paul's visit and his letter:

Paul visited Ephesus in 52 AD and wrote this letter back to the churches that had begun there in 60 from prison in Rome. Paul identifies himself as an "apostle" (1:1) which literally means someone who is sent. Since he cannot be there in person, this letter stands as his representative. The letter can be summed up in one sentence: "Because of who God is and what he has done for you (Chapters 1-3), here then is how you are to live (Chapters 4-6).

The letter divides at 4:1, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Paul spends three chapters laying the foundation of who God is and what God has done and then closes with three chapters of what God then requires of those who believe that to be true. You can see this in when Paul uses commands. There is only one command in the first three chapters and that is found in 2:11 where he tells them to remember. There are 40 commands in the last three chapters! Before you get practical, Paul understands that they first must understand something about God. You don't rush into or jump into application ignorantly. You first must understand who God is and what he is doing or else you get yourself in a mess.

Ephesians Chapter 1

Read Ephesians 1:1-14

These opening verses are all about God. Here Paul lays out at least seven things God has done for us.

What seven things does Paul say God has done for us?

Chosen us (1:4), predestined us (1:5), given us grace (1:6), redeemed us (1:7), forgiven us (1:7), made his will known to us (1:9), marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit (1:13)

Why do you think God has done all of this for YOU?

- Because we are valuable to God and he loves us

God sees you as valuable

All these things God has done for us reflect how valuable we are in God's sight.

Chosen/predestined (1:4-5):

We all know how it feels not to be picked. Whether it was when we were a kid and we were the last one to get picked for the team or whether it is a job interview that doesn't go so well and we don't get the job. We don't like not being wanted. We don't like rejection.

God loves you so much, he chose you. We think about how we are supposed to seek God. *But have you ever stopped to think that he is seeking you out as well? What do you think about that?*

Being chosen is not that God picks out individuals before they are born and is going to save them no matter what, regardless of what they do in life. This being chosen is about how God has chosen for himself a people, those who believe in and follow his Son Jesus Christ.

Grace, redemption, & forgiveness (1:6-7):

The only way God is able to do all of this is mentioned by Paul in 1:6-7. God's grace. *Why does God have to be graceful if he is going to accept us as his own?*

What does that teach us about who God is?

What does it teach us about the value he sees in each and every one of us?

The reason Paul probably wanted to remind them of these facts about who God is and what God is doing is to keep them from thinking the world is able to offer them what they need. *How does the world today attempt to deceive us to think we don't really need God?*

Let's pretend for a moment that none of what Paul says about God and how God views us in Ephesians 1:1-14 is true. No redemption, no being chosen by God, no forgiveness...*where would that leave us?*

How do these verses show that yes, we really do need God?

- Apart from God we have no hope
- Apart from Christ's sacrifice we have no forgiveness (Heb 9:22)

Sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13-14):

The last thing Paul says God has done for us gives us some assurance that God is going to make good on seeing us through to have life in him.

What does Paul mean by "inheritance"?

- This includes heaven but it is more than that.
- Our inheritance is our status as God's holy people who have a special relationship with him from the moment of our baptism until we live with him forever.

Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Christians (1:15-23):

What three things does Paul's prayer for them include?

- Thanksgiving (1:16)
- Spirit of wisdom and revelation (1:17)
- Opening the eyes of their heart (1:18)

In 1:9 Paul said God made known to us the mystery of his will...now he says there is still more we can learn about God as Christians need even more wisdom to learn even more about God and his will (1:17-18).

The last thing Paul focuses on is God's power (1:19-23). *What does Paul say God did that demonstrates just how powerful he really is?*

- Paul says the power God used to raise Christ from the dead is far greater than any power on the earth and has more authority than anything else for all eternity.
- This world pretends to have power but it is nothing compared to God's power.
- No matter what this world throws at us, even death itself, it cannot defeat God's people

How does it give you hope to know how powerful God is, that he loves you so much, and that he is willing to use that power to benefit you and your life?

Application:

How can you live more and more like someone chosen by God?

Have you ever doubted your own self worth? How does seeing yourself through God's eyes help you see the value you really have in the eyes of your creator?

How does this chapter give you hope to face whatever challenges are ahead of you at this point in your life?

Have you ever trusted the world to provide for you more than God? How do these verses help you get that right?

Lesson 10 – Ephesians 2

Members of God's Household

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

The first chapter focused in on God. The second chapter of Ephesians focuses in on us. The first chapter was about who God is and what he has done on our behalf. The second chapter is about who we are as a result and how we come together as God's holy people.

Who you used to be (2:1-3):

Paul takes them back to a time before they were Christians. *What does Paul say they were before they knew Christ in 2:1?*

- They were dead...even though their bodies were alive, they were dead apart from Christ

What does Paul say made them dead (2:1-3)?

- It was a result of our own transgression and sin
- Paul says at that time in our lives, before we were Christians, we followed the ways of this world and gratified our sinful desires.

That is a pretty bad place to be: dead and apart from God.

God came to the rescue (2:4-7):

But verse 4 tells us that God started rescued us. He made us alive. We didn't deserve it but God did it anyway. *What three characteristics of God does Paul list that were a part of why God rescued us from being dead in sin (2:4-5)?*

- Love, mercy & grace

This is a resurrection of sorts. Those who have been baptized into Christ have also been raised with Christ (Romans 6:4-5). What is more, God has seated us with Christ in heavenly realms (2:6). *What do you think that means?*

- The spiritual reality of our lives is that we are united with Christ and that should make a real difference in the way we live our lives.

How did God do this (2:8-10)?

Ephesians 2:8-10 have caused a lot of confusion among Christians. There are two extremes some people take, neither of which are correct:

1. That we do everything to be saved - the harder we try the more likely we are to be saved. It is like we are twisting God's arm that once we are good enough he has to save us. Once we follow all the rules we will be saved.
2. That we do nothing to be saved – Because we are saved by grace, there is nothing we can do that has anything to do with our salvation.

What did Paul really say in Ephesians 2:8-10?

- We are saved by grace, not by works (2:8-9)
- That our salvation is a gift from God (2:8)
- That God did create us to do good works (2:10)

So there is nothing we can do to **earn** our salvation because it is a completely graceful act for God to save any one of us. Yet there are things God expects us to do. In other words, if we had nothing to do with the process of salvation God, in his grace, would just save everyone whether they like it or not. But scripture is clear that is not the case (2 Thess 2:12 for instance).

The solution – We don't earn our salvation in the sense that once we are good enough, we earned God saving us. God saves us completely by his grace. It is a graceful act because no matter how hard we try we will never deserve it. Yet, God does want us to exhibit a transformed character. God wants us to seek him. God wants us to pursue righteousness.

Saved for God's Household (2:11-22):

Since God has saved us, we have a new identity. These verses have a lot to do with Jews and Gentiles being brought together through Christ. Many in Paul's audience in Ephesus were first generation Christians who had grown up as pagans.

Christ was the one who unified all people so that anyone could become a child of God:

- 2:13 – Christ brought those who were far off (Gentiles) near
- 2:14 – Christ destroyed the barrier of the law to make mankind one to bring peace between Jews and Gentiles
- 2:17 – He preached peace
- 2:18 – He gave all his people access to the Father by the Spirit
- 2:19 – The result is the Gentiles are now just as much God's people as Christian Jews.

Paul finishes describing God's uniting work with the image of a house that is built from various parts that comes together into one holy temple for God (2:19-22).

How do the people in the church come together to form a building for God's purposes?

What does all this mean for us today? It means that the man-made walls of division that spring up are not godly. Anything that divides God's people stands counter to what Christ came to do.

What types of divisions do we see in our culture today?

- Racial, socio-economic, etc

What types of divisions does the church deal with today?

- Divided over doctrine
- Some are still divided racially

While God does not want us to overlook major doctrinal error that so often takes place in various Christian groups he does want us to realize that his intention for us is unity and for us to take that seriously. It seems where this is most practical is not on the church level but on the individual level.

Are there people at Northwest you feel divided from? Why?

Do you ever feel like you aren't good enough for God? How does this chapter help you see that while we don't deserve God's grace, he loves us enough to give it anyway?

How does recognizing our common status in Christ and with his Spirit help us fix those things?

Lesson 11 – Ephesians 3

God's Mystery Revealed

What we read in the first two chapters had a lot to do with how God has called a people to himself from darkness and death to light and life. In this chapter Paul addresses the issue of how God has called the Gentiles (non-Jews) into his kingdom.

In the Old Testament a Gentile could believe in God and become one of his people but they had to be circumcised and obey the law. In the New Testament those dividing lines are being removed as Christ has died for all mankind. This created some confusion for early Christians and Paul is trying to help straighten things out.

Read Ephesians 3:1-13

Paul starts out by telling us that he isn't just making all this up. *Where does Paul say this information is coming from? (3:3)*

- God revealed it to him

In 3:6 he plainly explains the mystery of what God is doing with the Gentiles. *What three things does Paul say make up the mystery of what God is doing with the Gentiles?*

- Heirs with Israel
- Members of one body
- Sharing in God's promise

Before Jesus came the Gentiles would not have been allowed to be any of these three things without following many of the Jewish rules including the males being circumcised. But now Christ has removed any and all obstacles from the Gentiles being part of God's people. This is not hard for us to understand as most of us are Gentiles who are Christians. But for first-generation Christians this would have been more difficult to understand because it was all new to them.

What does it mean to be an heir with Israel?

- God has promised his people certain blessings, we are now able to share with them in those blessings

What would those blessings include?

- All spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3)
- Grace (Eph 1:7)
- Wisdom (Eph 1:8)
- Eternal life (Matt 19:29)

God brought Gentiles into his kingdom through the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 3:11 Paul wrote all these things were accomplished by God through Christ. *What does Paul say, then, we are able to do because of Christ in 3:12?*

- Approach God with freedom and confidence

We cannot physically walk up to God's throne. So what does Paul mean when he writes, "approach God with freedom and confidence"?

- At the very least he is talking about prayer – that God hears and cares about our prayers

When you pray do you do so confidently? How does knowing Christ has opened up a way to God for you and your prayers help you pray with confidence that God cares about what you have to say and wants to hear it all?

How do you balance praying with confidence with letting God's will be done?

- Our confidence is not that God will do everything we say or ask for.
- Our confidence is that because God cares and hears our prayers, he is going to do the right thing. He isn't going to sit there uncaring or concerned.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul immediately goes into a confident prayer of his own. *What does Paul pray for?*

- God would give them strength
- Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith
- Them to be rooted and established in love so they can grasp how amazing God's love really is!
- To know the great love of God

Which of these four things do you think you need the most?

Which of these four things could you pray for someone you know?

Last, Paul tells us a little more about God through his prayer. 3:20-21 is all about God. God is the "him who is able to do." Paul is not talking about talented people in the church. He closes his prayer by giving God glory and praise.

What familiar word does Paul close his prayer with (3:21)?

- Amen
- Amen means truly – testifying that these things are true

Trick question – *Does anyone know which Greek word "amen" comes from?*

- Comes from the Greek word "amen"!

Application:

How does this chapter inspire you to have more confidence in your prayers to God?

How do verses 17-19 inspire you to reflect the love of Christ to others?

Lesson 12 - Ephesians 4:1-5:20

Living for God

One of the questions we should ask ourselves often is, “Who am I really living for?” In the last half of Ephesians, Paul gives us some practical wisdom and commands regarding how we actually live for God. Conversion takes place in more than a moment. Conversion is a lifelong process. In the next two lessons, we will get some practical wisdom on how to live for God.

Read 4:1-16

Live up to your calling:

If you remember back in chapter one Paul told us we had been chosen or called by God. Paul now tells us that calling is so great and honored that our lives should attempt to match it.

What would it mean for a soldier to live worthy of his calling? What would it mean for a Christian?

What five things does Paul tell us in 4:2-3 that would help us live a life worthy of our calling in Christ? Which do you find easiest and which most challenging?

God expects certain things of us. Some people have such a view of grace that they believe God does everything and we do nothing. That is not the case. We don't earn our salvation by the things we do, but God still expects them to be done. Paul reminds us how God's grace makes up for our shortcomings in 4:7

Next, we see this calling is Christ initiated (Ephesians 4:11-16). *Christ gives us responsibilities (4:11) so we can do what (4:12-13)?*

Ultimately Christ wants us to grow into maturity. **Read 4:14-16 again**

What image of a mature body of believers does Paul give us?

The image of God's people as a body joined together by ligaments further emphasizes how unified we are to be as God's people. It is important we make every effort to get along with each other (4:4) because God has joined us together! Unfortunately sin can get in the way.

Read 4:25-31

How does sin disrupt unity in the church?

Some people believe sin is only a problem if you get caught. Here we learn that the results of our sin, even private sins, can have a damaging effect on our unity as God's people. Unity is more than just being nice to each other in public or not raising a stink over things. Unity is a spiritual reality for God's people and we must try our best to live holy lives in order to maintain that unity.

The ultimate answer to Christian unity comes in 5:1-2. *What command does Paul give that if all Christians really followed, we would have a lot less problems in Christianity?*

Why do we often fail to imitate Christ and take on ungodly actions and attitudes?

Paul now tells us more about the results of sin. It is even worse than disrupting the unity within God's people. *What does he say sin results in (5:5-7)?*

Last, Paul tells them to live as children of light (5:8). *What do you think that means?*

- This means we live our lives for the truth. We do not cover things up or do things in darkness that we would otherwise be ashamed of.

The Transparency trap:

More and more we are seeing the transparency trap. Authenticity is valued in our culture. People can smell a hypocrite a mile away. But we have to be careful. Transparency does not mean we can do whatever we want as long as we are honest about it. We see this with many sins but one where this comes out a lot today is homosexuality. People think that by "coming out of the closet" that the person is just being authentic and honest with themselves. Just because something feels right doesn't mean it is righteous! Our feelings and desires are not the ultimate standard for moral behavior.

How have you seen the transparency trap happen? Have you ever tried to rationalize things that way?

Paul concludes this section telling us that we must take care of our lives and our behaviors (5:15). He tells us to seek out the praiseworthy things in life and that when our lives are full of praise and thanks to God (5:19) that we will have truly made the most of every opportunity (5:16).

Application:

What do you believe Christ is preparing you for in ministering to others?

How do you see works of service being tied to maturity in the faith? Is there a connection? Why? (from 4:12-16)

Are there areas of your life that have been kept private because you are afraid what others will think of you? How would you deal with that, if that is what you were facing?

What things (spiritual or physical) do you have to be thankful for so that you can give praise and honor to God over those blessings?

Lesson 13 – Ephesians 5:21-6:24

Practical Instruction

Paul mentions three sets of relationships in chapters 5 & 6 that each have two parts: husbands & wives, children & parents, slaves & masters. Relationship never involved one party having an obligation to the other. All relationships are reciprocal and place requirements on both parties.

Husbands & Wives (Read Ephesians 5:21-33):

First, Paul calls on all Christians to view each other with an attitude of submission. *What do you think submission means? How would you see Christians needing to submit to each other?*

Paul says that Christians should submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. That means out of respect for Christ we love each other enough and see each and every Christian as someone Jesus died for. We don't always have to have our way because other people are too important to just run over. We don't abuse each other or take advantage of other Christians.

Wives are told to submit to their husbands (5:22). Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church (5:25,28).

What does it mean for husbands that they are to give himself up for his wife, as Christ did for the church?

- This is more than jumping in front of a bullet. It may be easier to have a one-time act of self-sacrifice than to have a daily lifestyle of self-sacrifice for one's wife.

When a husband is being a servant leader and one who is constantly self-sacrificing for his wife, will it make it easier or harder on wives to fulfill their role as defined in 5:22? Why?

Children and Parents (Read Ephesians 6:1-4):

Children and parents have different roles to play. Problems can arise in the home when we get our roles out of order. Today we see that the role of parents and children get reversed. The children are calling the shots and the parents are being their buddy more than their parent. Some parents want so badly for their children to love them that they try to be more a friend than a parent. Paul says that children are to be brought up "in the training and instruction of the Lord." (6:4). While we want to be on friendly, loving terms with our children we also realize that they are depending on their parents to learn how to live their lives in a godly way.

How does a parent find balance between giving their children the love and affection they need and the discipline and training they need?

Slaves and masters (Read Ephesians 6:5-9):

While these roles don't exist in the United States today we can still learn something about how we are to live from them.

Paul could have gone on about how unfair things can be as a slave but he didn't. Instead he points out that how we live in the roles we find ourselves makes a difference in the eyes of God. The question is not how fair life is going to be. The question is how are we going to live a godly life in the situation we find ourselves.

What unfair obstacles do you face in your life or workplace that may be a test of your character?

How are you going to handle those in a way that honors and glorifies God?

For those of us who are the boss Paul has some words about how we treat those who are under our authority. *What does Paul tell masters to do in 6:9? In the same way as what?*

- In the same way as he just told slaves to treat their master in 6:7-8 to do so as to the Lord and in a good and honorable way.

For those of you who have some level of authority in your workplace, what has been the biggest challenge to use that position in a way that honors God? Has it challenged you to see the value in people who are not as high up in position?

The Armor of God (Read 6:10-24):

Now Paul speaks to all those in the house churches of Ephesus. Here he reminds us that we are all in a fight. *Who does Paul say we are struggling against? (6:12)*

- The fight is not against some political party or someone in the church we disagree with.
- Paul says there are spiritual realities in this world that would like to do us harm.

If we are going to win that battle we have to be aware of it (6:18), prepare ourselves for it (6:13-17), and fight!

How do you become more aware of the spiritual realities that surround us on a daily basis?

How do you practically follow Paul's advice in putting on all this figurative armor?

Last, prayer is important in this. You don't go out and fight this battle all on your own. In 6:18 Paul tells them to pray in the Spirit on all occasions.

Complacency is one of the biggest challenges we can face as Christians. One of the best things we can do to combat it is to get in the habit of starting off our day on the right foot, being aware of the importance of each day in God's eyes. We prepare for less important things – having good smelling breath and clothes with no wrinkles. *How are we preparing for the most important things before we start our day?*

What are some things in your life that you have grown complacent about spiritually?

What are some things you could do to start off your day on the right foot?

Lesson 14 – Introduction to Philippians & Chapter 1

Partnering in the Gospel

Introduction:

Philippians was probably written while Paul was in prison (62 AD) in Rome back to the church in Philippi. Acts 16 tells us about Paul's time in Philippi. He and Silas ran into opposition and were put in jail. God miraculously released them from jail resulting in the conversion of his jailor (Acts 16:24-34). So Paul knew the Christians in Philippians and is writing this letter back to them to encourage them against false teaching in the church and threats from outside the church.

Partnership in the Gospel (1:1-11):

What does it mean to be "partners in the Gospel"?

For Paul, knowing that he was on the same mission as the Christians in Philippi gave him great joy because he knew that what was started among them would be seen through to completion (1:3-6). That means, God was not through with them yet. There was still more growing, learning, and maturing to do. That is what Paul prays for on their behalf in 1:9-11. *What two things does Paul pray for them in those verses?*

- Their love to abound and for them to be filled with the fruit of righteousness

What three things does Paul say will result from that?

- They will be able to discern what is best, they may be pure and blameless, and that God would receive glory and praise

How would our becoming more loving result in any of those things?

Suffering for Christ (1:12-30):

We will all go through suffering at some time or another. Some of us more than others. The question is not when or how much we have to endure but whether or not those sufferings are used for God. *What does Paul say is the result of his suffering in 1:12-14?*

- The gospel has been advanced, the palace guard now have some understanding of Christ, and it has encouraged Christians to be more bold about their faith

Paul mentions two groups of people who are causing trouble the Philippian Christians are having deal with. The first group is within the church (1:15-18) and the second is outside the church (1:27-28). With both groups Paul says the end result is the same – God will use both to work for good in the lives of the Philippians.

In 1:18 he says the troublemakers in the church at least preach Christ. In 1:28-30 says the troublemakers outside the church will be destroyed but that the Christians will be saved by God. So their sufferings will be used for godly purposes resulting in the salvation of God's people.

How have you seen God work "bad" things for good?

Romans 8:28 reinforces this idea – God is able to ultimately use all things for the good of his kingdom.

What about Paul's own suffering? We learn a lot in this chapter about how he views his suffering and how it can be used for God. *What does he hope for in 1:20 regardless of whether he lives or dies?*

No matter what things in life we have to worry about this puts things into perspective. You may not like your job. You may have difficult relatives. You may have an illness or wrestle with some serious issues. *Bottom line – is Christ being exalted through your life?* If we can answer that a “Yes” then what else do we have to worry about because our lives are being lived the way God made us to live.

“to live is Christ and to die is gain” – Philippians 1:21

How does this verse put our life and sufferings into perspective?

This is like saying to a child going through a tough time, the worst that can happen is make tomorrow Christmas day. That would be a hopeful thought. As Christians, we have much more in store than a day full of presents. Even if we die, life awaits, God awaits, Christ awaits...how much better could things get?

99.9% of us will be alive next week and so practically speaking, it is important that we learn to live well for Christ.

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” – Phil 1:27

When bad things happen it is easy to make excuses to backslide. Paul encourages them to press on and that whatever happens to him in prison, whether he is released or whether he is killed that they continue to live for Christ Jesus.

How can discouragement be a roadblock to a healthy faith?

What things are you facing that make it difficult to live worthy of the gospel of Christ?

Paul does end up being executed in jail at Rome. Paul never says, bad things might happen to me but for you things will be different. He never returns to see them and never writes back again.

Why should we expect to have problems in the world if we are really standing firm in our faith and living in a manner worthy of the Gospel?

Application:

What suffering or struggles have you faced as a result of your faith in Christ?

Who is one hurting person you could encourage this week to build their faith?

What areas of your life are still needing some help to be lived in a manner worthy of the Gospel?

Lesson 15 – Philippians 2

Shining Like Stars for God

Paul is going to do some real convincing in Philippians 2. He is out to convince them that if God truly has made a difference in their lives that they should respond by being Christ-like. It is an “if...then” type statement. If these things are true, then you should do the following.

Read Philippians 2:1-5

What things does Paul list as differences God had made in their lives (2:1-2)?

What then does he call them to do as a result? (2:3-5)

Philippians 2:3-5 have to be some of the hardest verses in the Bible to put into practice. These verses go against the grain of everything the world has ever had to say about how we should live our lives. *What makes these verses so counter cultural?*

It is not easy to put aside the things we want and the way we want things to be in order to provide for the best interests of others. Our world tells us that the only one who will really look after you is you. So do your best to do and get everything you want. Not so, says Paul. There is actually more blessing that comes from being a giving person than a taking person.

What is the difference between givers and takers?

Read Philippians 2:6-11

In order for us to live a Christ-like life we have to know how he lived. Paul gives a quick 6 verse summary of the life and ministry of Christ. In these 6 verses, Paul highlights the selflessness of Christ.

What phrases in these verses show how selfless Christ was?

But the very first thing Paul says is Christ is in the very nature, God. He is divine. He is supreme. He is Lord. Everything in the world says, if you can call the shots, call the shots. If you have authority, use it. Verse 6 tells us Christ let go of all those privileges in order to make a difference for us. The word “grasped” in 2:6 can mean “a violent seizure of property” (BDAG, 133). In other words, Christ didn’t forcefully claim all the rights he was entitled to but he gave them up.

If you had all the attributes of God, how quickly would you give them up in order to become a mortal human being?

How can we exhibit these Christ-like actions and attitudes 2000 years later?

Read Philippians 2:12-18

God’s people are up to something good. We are partnering with God. 2:12 says we are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling” and 2:13 says God is the one working in us to “will and act according to his good purpose.” We both do our part. We have a part to play and God has a part to play in accomplishing God’s purposes in this world.

What part do you feel you have to play in carrying out God's purposes in your life?

How do you feel God has worked in your life toward those same purposes?

The result of all of this is our shining in the world for God (2:15). Part of letting that light shine is "holding out the word of life" *When you are living for God, how is your life like a light in the world?*

How do we "hold out the word of life" today?

- This includes sharing the Gospel with non-Christians
- It also includes living our life in such a way that God's word is seen clearly through our character.

Read Philippians 2:19-30

Last, Paul makes arrangements for sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Christians in Philippi. There is one main lesson we learn from Paul's perspective on sending these two men back. That is, Paul is putting into practice the need to have a Christ-like and selfless attitude.

If you were in prison, what would make it hard to send these two men away?

With Paul in prison, it would seem he would need these two men to help him more than the Philippians would. Paul says he has no one else like Timothy and he is sending him back. Paul says they sent Epaphroditus to him to take care of his needs. Paul still has needs in jail! Yet Paul sends him back because Paul realizes he isn't the only one who has needs.

Why is it difficult to think of others when our own situations in life are tough?

What can we learn from Paul in putting others above ourselves?

Application:

Who is someone you remember because of their concern for you? What did they do?

Who is in your life who would benefit from you putting their interests above your own?

What challenges to obedience to God do you face and how can this chapter help you face them so you too can shine like a star for God?

Lesson 16 – Philippians 3 & 4

Growing Closer to the Lord

Read 3:1-11

Paul starts this chapter with a call to rejoice. This is quite a bold statement written by someone in chains. It is important that we know how to find joy through our relationship with Christ. The world thinks that Christians are joyless and that we miss out on all the “good stuff” but that simply not the case.

How has your relationship with Christ brought you joy?

Why doesn't the world understand that being a Christian is something that brings us joy?

- Maybe they have known angry Christians or maybe their view of happiness and joy is really messed up.

In 3:2-11 Paul talks about one barrier that can rob us of the true joy of growing closer to Christ. That barrier is called self-righteousness. When Paul talks about “mutilators of the flesh” he is talking about Christian Jews who were going around teaching that faith in Christ was insufficient for salvation. Because the Old Testament said people were to be circumcised to be a part of the covenant people of God they were still teaching that without circumcision one could not be in relationship with God or Christ.

How does Paul point out the pointlessness of putting our confidence in works of self-righteousness?

- He uses himself as an example, that he had done all those things just right
- He considers anything credited to his own doing as loss for the sake of Christ (3:7)

Paul realized that righteousness could never come by obeying the law of Moses (3:9) but only through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is what leads us toward the ultimate goal of the resurrection of our bodies to live with God forever (3:11)

Paul never met Christ in the flesh. Neither have we. Like Paul, we all should have a deep desire to know Christ more and to share in as much of Christ's life on earth as possible. That includes joys (3:1) and suffering (3:10).

How badly do you want to know Christ?

When was a time in your life that you felt the closest connected to Christ? Was it tied to a time of joy or suffering?

Read 3:12-21

Even though Paul sees that righteousness come through faith in Christ, he still says it is necessary that we press ahead. We can't just believe in God and sit around waiting for him to save us. God wants us to seek him out, to strain ahead by faith toward the goal.

What is the goal of our lives?

Our goal is to live with God forever in heaven where we are already citizens (3:20). *What does it mean to be a citizen of heaven even though we still live here?*

Last, Paul says this takes the transformation of our bodies. We aren't perfect yet but one day we will be!

What are you looking forward to the most about heaven?

What are you doing here and now to make your life more and more in line with God's kingdom?

Read Philippians 4:1-23

Three things jump out about this chapter as Paul closes this letter to the church in Philippi.

1 – He continues to call them to having a rejoicing spirit. In order to have this he calls on them to give over all their anxieties to God through prayer (4:6-7) which will result in peace.

Why is it hard to rejoice if you have anxiety and no peace?

How does prayer help relieve anxiety and bring you peace?

2 – Paul emphasizes the importance of thinking about positive things (4:8). If we are going to rejoice, we can't have our minds in the gutter. It is so difficult to control our minds. Paul tells us this is still important that we think about excellent things and don't let our minds wonder into thinking about wicked and evil things.

Have you ever struggled with evil thoughts? What did it take to overcome it?

3 – We are to be concerned enough about each other that we share in each other's sufferings (4:10, 14).

What does it mean to share in someone's troubles?

Have you ever been concerned for someone so much that you were able to share their troubles?

Paul says God will meet all their needs (4:19). *What needs do you have that your life group might be able to help with so that we can put into practice with one another Paul's principle of sharing these things with each other?*