



The Message of the Bible

Week 32: Philippians & Colossians

The Teaching of Philippians

The Salutation (1:1–2)

1. Whereas in Galatians and Ephesians Paul appealed to his apostleship, here he describes himself and Timothy as “bond-servants.”
2. This salutation is also distinguished by the mention of “overseers” and “deacons.” Overseers (*episkopoi*) are also known as “elders.” Note how “elder” and “overseer” are used interchangeably in Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7. We will address church government more specifically in the pastoral epistles.

Opening Thanksgiving (1:3–11)

1. Paul joyfully prayed for these saints because of their consistent “participation in the gospel.”
2. Paul prayed that their love would grow in knowledge and discernment. The reason they needed these things was to be able to approve what was excellent.
3. Paul’s concern was that the Philippians might continue to be sincere and blameless in the Gospel. This takes discernment.

Paul’s Circumstances in Advancing the Gospel (1:12–26)

1. The situation for Paul was obviously perilous, but it served the spread of the Gospel.
2. Like the Philippians, Paul needed discernment (v. 22) in making a decision about his ministry. He declared his commitment to remain steadfast for the sake of those to whom he is writing (vv. 25–26).
3. The Philippians should follow Paul’s example in these things (cf. v. 30).

Exhortation to Walk Worthy of the Gospel (1:27–3:1)

1. The exhortation to walk worthy is also directed toward their steadfastness in the Gospel.
2. Thus, in encouraging them to walk worthy, Paul emphasizes the result of unity; that is, Paul wanted the Philippian believers to strive together “for the faith of the gospel” (1:27).
3. To fight against factionalism and to promote such unity, they must pursue humility toward one another, which Paul keenly describes in 2:1–4.
4. The highest example of this type of attitude is Christ (vv. 5–11).
5. Fortunately for believers, God works these things in us as we diligently pursue them.

6. In addition to Jesus, Paul provides two other examples of this type of humility—Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul encourages them to “hold men like him [i.e., Epaphroditus] in high regard” (2:29). Just as in the example of Christ, it was humility that brings exaltation.

Warning against False Teachers (3:2–4:1)

1. Paul warns his readers about “the dogs” (3:2) whom he describes as “evil workers” and “enemies of the cross” (3:18).
2. These are those “whose god is their appetite,” “whose glory is in their shame,” and “who set their mind on earthly things” (3:19). However, true believers are those “who worship in the spirit of God,” who “glory in Christ Jesus,” and who “put no confidence in the flesh” (3:3).
3. Thus, it is no wonder that Paul focuses on humility, because it is the exact opposite of what these false teachers pursued.
4. Paul learned from his own experience that outward achievement or status was contrary to the work of Christ. His credentials were useless; he needed the righteousness “which comes from God on the basis of faith” (3:9).
5. The goal of the Christian walk is maturity; and maturity comes when one follows the example of Paul: “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:14; cf. v. 15).

Exhortations to the Philippians (4:2–9)

1. Paul first addresses an issue of dissension between two faithful women (vv. 2–3).
2. The exhortations here, as elsewhere in the book, apply primarily to the mind (or attitude).

Paul’s Joy for Their Partnership (4:10–20)

1. Paul reminds them of how he rejoiced over the love that they expressed so tangibly to him.
2. He also uses this as an example to address the topic of contentment.

The Epilogue (4:21–23)

The Purpose of Philippians

Paul exhorted the Philippians to not veer away from genuineness and steadfastness in following the Gospel.

Paul rejoiced in the Philippians’ partnership in the Gospel and exhorted them to be better Gospel partners by walking in unity with one another and holding the Gospel in steadfastness against the opponents of the faith. (Keith Essex)

The Teaching of Colossians

The Prologue (1:1–14)

1. In vv. 3–8, Paul lays out the reasons that he prays for this group of faithful believers:

- a. their faith in Christ Jesus
 - b. their love for the saints (in the Spirit)
 - c. the hope awaiting them in heaven
 - d. the fruit that the Gospel was producing in them
 - e. their understanding of the grace of God in truth
2. Paul prays that they might have a deeper knowledge of the truth they have already received, so that in wisdom they might walk worthy of the Lord. He summarizes what a worthy walk looks like in vv. 10–12.
 3. They should give thanks to the Father, because He brought them into the kingdom of His Son, in whom believers have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Person and Work of Christ (1:15–23)

1. Having mentioned the Son of God, Paul moves to a clear explanation of His supremacy, relying heavily upon the Old Testament, particularly Genesis 1:1, 26 and Psalm 2.
2. In His person, the Son of God is
 - a. the image of the invisible God
 - b. the firstborn of all creation
 - c. before all things
 - d. the beginning, the firstborn from the dead
 - e. fully God
3. In His work, the Son of God
 - a. created everything
 - b. holds all things together
 - c. heads the church
 - d. reconciles all things to Himself
 - e. reconciles believers to a life of faithfulness
4. Paul also shows specific purposes of the Father in all these things:
 - a. All things were created “for Him.”
 - b. He was raised first from the dead “so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

Paul’s Ministry of the Gospel to the Church (1:24–2:5)

1. Having described the heart of the Gospel, Paul moves to the nature of his ministry of the Gospel.
2. Paul characterizes his proclamation as admonishment and teaching.
3. The goal of his ministry is the presentation of every man as mature in Christ. This purpose consumed Paul.
4. Paul was concerned that his readers have a proper understanding of Christ, because in Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3).

5. True knowledge of Christ brings protection (2:4) and stability of faith (2:5).

Warning against False Teaching (2:6–23)

1. After encouraging them to walk in Christ, as they had been instructed, Paul warns them of the danger of philosophies and deceptions of the world that are contrary to true teaching about Christ.
2. Not only does the fullness of Deity dwell in Christ, but believers have been made complete in Him. Thus, his cross has destroyed all things that were hostile to the true knowledge of Christ.
3. Therefore, because believers have died with Christ to the world, there is no reason to return to decrees, self-made religion, and self-abasement (including severe treatment of the body). These things have no effect on fleshly indulgence anyway.

Exhortations for Proper Conduct in the Gospel (3:1–4:6)

1. The proper frame of mind for those who are raised up with Christ is heavenward.
2. Colossians addresses generally many of the same issues as Ephesians. They are specifically concerned about how believers treat believers.
3. Paul's exhortations get very specific:
 - a. Wives should be subject to their husband because such an attitude is fitting in the Lord.
 - b. Husbands should love their wives with patience and gentleness.
 - c. Children should obey their parents in all things because it pleases the Lord.
 - d. Fathers should not exasperate their children.
 - e. Slaves should obey their masters because they fear the Lord.
 - f. Masters should treat their slaves with justice and fairness, like their Master.
4. His exhortations conclude with instructions for prayer, being wise toward outsiders, and for proper speech.

The Epilogue (4:7–18)

The Purpose of Colossians

Because of the danger of false teaching about Christ, Paul warns teaches believers about the nature and work of Christ as well as their union with Him. This union produces proper conduct.

Gentile Christians were taught about Christ and their union with Him and were exhorted to have their conduct flow from that union with Christ. (Keith Essex)

How should I respond?