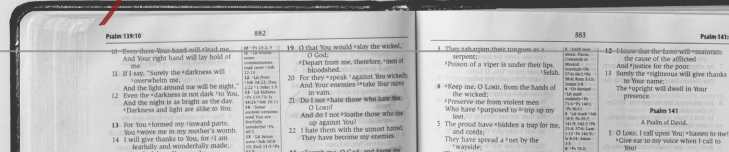


WORDS *of* TRUTH

“The Prison Epistles”



Theme Articles

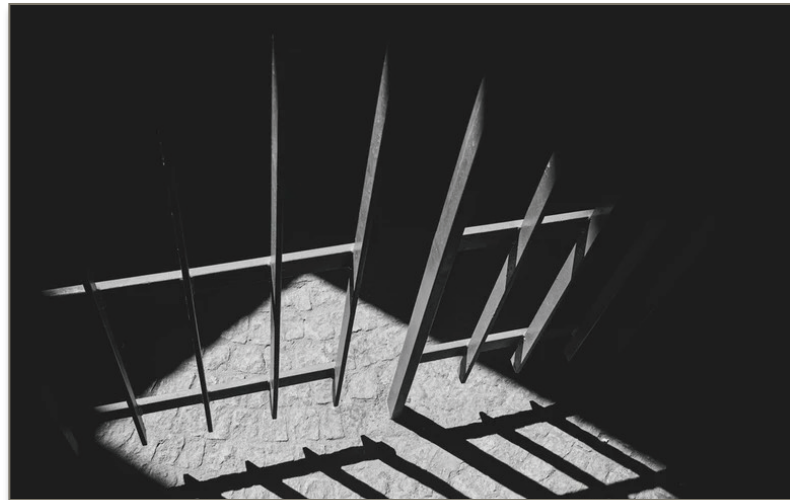
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Paul in Prison

Prison is a place for the guilty. It is an injustice for an innocent person to serve time in a prison, just as it is an injustice for a guilty person to walk free. Prison is intended to be uncomfortable, inconvenient, and difficult. The apostle Paul spent his fair share of time in prisons. Some experiences were more dire than others, but none of them were deserved. In his time in prison, he exemplified faith, trust, and hope in God through Jesus Christ. He sang, prayed, and even wrote while he was incarcerated.

Paul's “Prison Epistles” are some of the most deeply and widely studied passages in all scripture. They contain positive encouragement, kind rebuke, loving requests, and tactful instructions. These letters teach us how to live as Christians – all written while a prisoner.

With society changing as it is, let us not indulge the notion that we will never be imprisoned for our faith. It happens elsewhere in the world, it could happen here too. Let us equip ourselves with a mindset that is prepared to endure injustice, and one that will continue teaching and sharing the truth, even if we are imprisoned for being Christians.

Paul's Time in Prison

Rick Brumback

At first I had been frustrated on behalf of our fellow disciple Paul. A trial before the procurator Felix and the ruler King Herod Agrippa II had resulted in both leaders declaring Paul's innocence of any charges, and declaring that he could have gone free had he not earlier appealed to Caesar (Acts 26:31-32; 25:11-12). Freedom was almost had; it was in his grasp! But my initial reaction to these developments was off the mark. Paul was never intended to go free. He was intended to travel to Rome and remain incarcerated, all for the cause of Jesus Christ.

The key to understanding these events is found in Acts 23:11, "The following night the Lord stood by him [Paul] and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.'" This programmatic statement drives the course of developments through the balance of the book. Paul had been preaching about Jesus in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21), but with Jesus' words of 23:11, the apostle learned of his divinely-appointed evangelistic mission in the imperial capital.

Reading the last six chapters of Acts provides the details of how 23:11 came to be realized. The book concludes with the observation, "He [Paul] lived there [in Rome] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance." Rather than look at the appeal to Caesar as a mistake, and the apostle's near-release as a missed moment of justice, I learned to see this process a part of the divine plan for sharing the good news of Jesus in another context. It was a success story!

Hearing that this is often referred to as Paul's first Roman imprisonment, readers may have a mental image of a dungeon cell and rather severe living conditions. And while that may have been true concerning the apostle's so-called second Roman imprisonment (details of which are provided in 2 Timothy 4), this first imprisonment would be better termed "house arrest." From Acts 28:30 we learn that he was in a rented accommodation rather than a dungeon or prison block. Recall that he had not had any actual charges accompanying him to Rome, a fact which was sure to cause the procurator, Festus, some embarrassment — sending someone off to trial when they had no charges against them. But how would he have paid for this rental? We do have evidence that brethren sent him funds, presumably to pay for his living expenses and other needs. In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul specifically mentions the financial support they provided him via the envoy Epaphroditus (Phil. 4:18). And in Philippians chapter 2, Epaphroditus served as an illustration of selfless service for the cause of Christianity given that he was willing to convey these funds to Paul and even became gravely ill in the process (Phil. 2:25-30).

What types of activity was Paul able to pursue during this period of house arrest? From the close of Acts 28 we learn that he was able to meet openly with visitors, often discussing and defending Christianity just as Jesus had predicted (Acts 23:11; 28:30-31). He had a significant enough personal presence that some fellow Christians in Rome were jealous of his activities and perhaps his reputation. Paul mentions those who preached out of envy just as there were those who preached from commendable motives (Phil. 1:15-18).

From his letters, we learn that Paul appears to have converted some of the military members and even some in the imperial household (Phil. 1:12-13). He even extended greetings to the Philippian Christians from the "saints...of Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22). We know he was assigned a guard who stayed with him, at least initially (Acts 28:16). This may have continued during his incarceration in Rome, thus affording him the opportunity to convert his minders. He had already crafted a favorable reputation among the military members he interacted with in his time in Caesarea and during his journey to Rome (see Acts 27:1-3, for example). The guards may well have been present each time Paul and visitors discussed the Christian faith.

One figure whom he is believed to have influenced was the runaway slave Onesimus. The latter was owned by the Christian Philemon, a member of the church on Colossae. Based upon Paul's letter to Philemon, Onesimus had fled Colossae to the capital and had, at some point, crossed paths with the apostle and had been converted to Christianity (Philemon 10-11). Paul subsequently sent him back to his master, but not empty-handed. Onesimus delivered a report about Paul, and perhaps a letter as well, to the church at Colossae (Col. 4:7-9). More important for his own situation as a runaway was that Onesimus delivered Paul's letter to Philemon in which the slaveowner is encouraged to recognize the new status of Onesimus: fellow Christian (Philemon 15-16).

There is one other avenue of influence extended by Paul during his first Roman imprisonment: the composition of his letters known as the "Prison Epistles." This is a collection of four letters—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon—composed during his two-year residency in Rome (A.D. 62-63). Various remarks in these letters supplement what we learn from the book of Acts about his time in the capital. These letters, written to congregations he helped to establish and grow (like the churches in Philippi and Ephesus), written on behalf of the runaway slave Onesimus (Philemon), and written to a congregation he had not visited (Colossians), reveal a number of details about both his activities and those concerns attached to these churches.

Throughout this ordeal, Paul appears to have remained optimistic and productive. This imprisonment period was announced with a sense of optimistic anticipation (Acts 23:11), and, to his credit, Paul maintained this same positive outlook (see Eph. 6:21-22; Phil. 1:12-14; 4:10-13; Col. 4:2, 8; Philemon 17-22). He admirably fulfilled the mission which Jesus announced, going to the capital and proclaiming the Good News!

Spiritual Blessings in the Heavenly Places: A Study of Ephesians

Jon Mitchell

The apostle Paul had been in prison for several years when he wrote his letter to the saints at Ephesus (Eph. 1:1-2; 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; cf. Acts 21-28). I have no doubt that he thought of his brethren there with fondness in his heart as the passing days brought him closer to his meeting with Caesar. In happier times, he had spent much time with them (Acts 19:1-10; 20:31). Luke's account of the tearful farewell between Paul and the elders at Ephesus shows the deep love he and the Ephesians had for each other (Acts 20:36-38). Now, years later, he writes them from prison under divine inspiration (Eph. 3:3-5; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-16; 14:37; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Despite his loss of freedom, the letter is very positive in nature because Paul's perspective was focused on the eternal and spiritual rather than the temporary and worldly (cf. Col. 3:1-2). He opens by blessing God the Father and pointing out to these Christians that he and they have been blessed **"with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"** (Eph. 1:3). The entire letter expounds on that theme.

Paul wrote that God had **"chose us in him before the foundation of the world"** for specific reasons: to be **"holy and blameless before him"** and to be adopted **"as sons through Jesus Christ"** so that we would **"praise"** the **"glorious grace"** with which **"he has blessed us in the Beloved"** (1:4-6). The predestination described in verse 5 and in Romans 8:29 is not Calvinistic, i.e., individualistic and without any obligation on our part. Rather, Paul is simply saying that God determined before Genesis that all who were faithful Christians would be adopted into his family and made holy and blameless before him. Accordingly, we have redemption and forgiveness through Christ's blood and God's grace (1:7-10), as well as an **"inheritance"** which was also **"predestined"** according to God's purpose and will (1:11). Paul wrote of all of these spiritual blessings, noting that they were guaranteed to the faithful at Ephesus because they were sealed with the Spirit (1:13-14).

For this reason, he thanked God for his brethren and prayed that God would continue to bless them and help them understand more about the spiritual blessings being given to them through Christ, the King of kings and **"head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all"** (1:15-23). Not only does Paul define the body of Christ as his church, but also gives insight as to why one is baptized **"into Christ"** when one is baptized **"into one body"** (Gal. 3:27; 1 Cor. 12:13). Christ fills up everything...but what fills up Christ? The answer is us, Christians...the church, his body! He would later expound on Christ's body by pointing out that there is only **"one body,"** just as there is also only **"one baptism"** and **"one faith"** (4:4-6), and that Christ is **"the Savior"** of his body (5:23). Thus, one of the spiritual blessings God gives to the faithful is the privilege of being part of...not a man-made denomination filled with false teaching and human traditions...but the church of Christ who is her Savior! Salvation is offered to all (Tit. 2:11), but in the end those who are in Christ's body – his church – will be saved by him.

Paul also reminded the Ephesians of their terrible spiritual condition before God saved them by his grace and mercy (2:1-7). He emphasized repeatedly that they were saved, not by their own doing, but by another spiritual blessing: the gift of God's grace (2:8-9). It is sad that many twist this passage to mean that obedience is not necessary, a blatant falsity (Heb. 5:9; Mat. 7:21; cf. James 2:14-26). Indeed, we were **"created...for good works"** (2:10; cf. Ecc. 12:13). Yet all of us have also sinned and thus deserve death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Thus, we need God's grace to be saved even while we obey...because none of us obey perfectly.

Yet obey we must, especially if we wish Christ's body to grow. Another spiritual blessing laid out in this letter is God's plan for church growth (4:11-14), which is followed when evangelists, shepherds, and teachers take the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets (the New Testament) and use them to **"equip the saints"** to serve, to edify the church with the goal of reaching the unity and spiritual maturity which is found in being like Christ, and to avoid false teaching. Basically, by **"speaking the truth in love"** the church is commanded to **"grow up in every way...into Christ"** (4:15). Only when **"each part"** of the church **"is working properly"** will the church grow and **"build itself up in love"** (4:16).

Perhaps that was not happening in Ephesus as it should. Paul had to remind them to live, act, and think differently than the rest of the world and be like Jesus instead in every way (4:17-5:21). There must have been worldliness creeping into their families, which Paul corrected while also giving insight into Christ's relationship with the church (Eph. 5:22-6:4). Strife between Christian slaves and masters had to be corrected (6:5-9). We also see hints of the universal problem in the first century church of strife between Jews and Gentiles when Paul addressed the Gentiles at Ephesus. Reminding them of their former estrangement from Christ (2:11-12), he then encouraged them by teaching that they were now **"brought near by the blood of Christ"** and were now **"one"** with their Jewish brethren due to Christ's **"abolishing"** of the law of Moses, thus making them **"no longer strangers and aliens"** but **"fellow citizens"** and **"members"** of God's household (2:13-22). Thus, we read of another spiritual blessing brought about by the power of the gospel Paul preached and which he prayed that the Ephesian church would grow to understand (3:1-21).

I've always thought that the final spiritual blessing mentioned in Ephesians would have helped them to resist the worldly temptations of Satan, just as it would do today if we took advantage of it. I'm speaking of God's most practical blessing, **"the whole armor of God"** which we need to **"stand against the schemes of the devil"** (6:10-17). Within this blessing are hidden many other blessings: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and **"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."** I've found that when I fail to put this armor on and use the weapon God has given me, I fail to receive and appreciate the other spiritual blessings available to me as a child of God. Other Christians have experienced the same thing.

May we all be more conscious of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places which are available to us. I hope this study of Ephesians has helped towards that end.

An Overview of Philippians

Drew Aldridge

If the letter to the Philippians has one central message, it is this: service to God is more important than any and all material concerns. This overarching theme presents itself in several ways throughout the letter, and so, by taking the letter as a whole, we can draw application of that idea to a wide range of life circumstances. Whether we find ourselves in times of suffering or prosperity, of peace or conflict, of separation or togetherness, Paul reminds us in this letter that centering our focus on God will lead us to ultimate fulfillment, whereas obsession with our physical circumstances can only leave us empty and dissatisfied.

Paul begins the letter with a strong emphasis on the joy and sense of purpose that he has in Christ. At this point in his life, he is in prison, he has left much of the social and economic security that he once had as a prominent Pharisee, and he has been beaten, shipwrecked, and nearly assassinated for his faith. Nevertheless, he has persevered, and now even his jailers have heard the gospel (1:13). Paul does not complain about his circumstances, though he does hope for eventual deliverance so that he can further encourage his readers. He sums up his attitude towards his sufferings and the possibility of his execution with the simple statement “for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” This is the true show of his devotion, not that he is willing to die, but that he is willing to live, to choose the pain of persecution and imprisonment so long as it allows him to do the work of Christ, even if it delays him from entering heaven.

As admirable as that attitude is, it is admittedly difficult for most people to apply to their everyday life. Though we all suffer in life, relatively few of us will find ourselves in Paul’s position, where we must weigh the options of life and death. As Paul continues, however, he shifts the focus to a more regular and practical part of our lives. He urges his readers to put Christ at the center of their interpersonal relationships. He tells them to put aside their own concerns in favor of each other’s needs, to have the mind of Christ, and to show the kind of complete humility that Jesus exemplified in His life and death (2:3-8). While most of us will never face the threat of death for our faith, all of us find ourselves in situations where our desires conflict with those of our friends, family, coworkers, or fellow Christians. However, by keeping in mind the ultimate theme of prioritizing the will of God, whether that means we all put aside our desires in favor of the work of Christ, or we simply choose to show Christian humility by privileging the needs of others over our own, we can work with one another in peace and unity. This, out of all the encouragement and advice given in Philippians, is perhaps the most frequently and easily applicable to our own lives. It is rare to encounter a situation in which focusing on the ideal of Christian unity would not be useful or important.

It is also worth noting that this section is where Paul does not primarily offer his own behavior as an example, but instead grounds the teaching in the example of Christ. While

Christ’s life was certainly filled with extraordinary circumstances that most of us will never encounter, His humility is so all encompassing that it guided even His most mundane activities, and so it makes sense that Paul, by inspiration, uses Him as the model for our everyday interactions.

By chapter 3, Paul has returned to using his own life, now as a contrast to those who boast in their flesh. Whereas the beginning of the book dealt primarily with prioritizing God’s will in the face of suffering, this section shows the other side of the coin. Here, Paul offers himself as the example of one who had as much reason as anyone to trust in his material circumstances, but instead he disregards them almost completely. Compared to the rewards of service to God, both in the fulfillment found in this life and in the eternal promise which Paul is seeking to attain, all physical benefits are nothing more than rubbish. It is ultimately pointless for any of us to try to find our value in our wealth, status, family, heritage, connections, talents, or anything else that is less than the promise of Christ. While those things may provide us with temporary benefits, there is nothing that compares to the hope of resurrection and eternal life, and that hope could never come from any material thing. Paul also gives an indirect reminder of the previous humility principle, as even though he uses himself as the positive example, he ends the thought by pointing out that even he has not fully attained the promise yet, that he still has work to do, and so if we are seeking to imitate him we should not merely imitate his past actions, but also his constant striving to be better.

In the final chapter, Paul sums up the message of the book in three small sections. In verses 4-7 he offers his readers the encouragement that they can find joy and peace in all circumstances of life, and that we can always seek comfort in prayer. These verses are not meant to say that worry or anxiety is sinful, but rather they are meant to be a comfort to us when we go through difficult phases of life. In verses 8-9 he expands his teaching on humility to several Christian virtues, and he reminds us that focusing on those virtues will never lead us astray. His final piece of doctrinal teaching is, again, the example of his own life. He shows that he has found an ultimate peace in Christ, and that no matter the state in which he finds himself, he can always endure and even prosper.

Philippians is a book of joy and peace written from circumstances that usually make those feelings seem impossible. It reminds us that to those who are in Christ there is always a light in the darkness, that we are never without help, and that we should always strive to build each other up so that we can all attain to the resurrection.

Prison Epistles: Colossians

Eddy Craft

There are so many similarities between the books of Ephesians and Colossians that some have asked why they are both in the New Testament. Of course, the answer is found in the fact that the emphasis is different. The emphasis of Ephesians is **the church of the Christ**, and the emphasis of Colossians is the **Christ of the church**. You can't love the book of Ephesians without loving the church of the Christ, and you can't love Colossians without loving the Christ of the church. Jesus is the preeminent one, *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1:18). Paul **praised** the church (1:1-8), **prayed** for them (1:9-14), and gave his **proclamation** to them (1:15-29).

Chapter 1 The preeminence of Christ is declared in His gospel, redemption, creation, hope, and in the church. These are twenty-nine of the most powerful verses in the Bible. In chapter one we see six reasons why we should serve the Christ. First is his **possession** of the kingdom (13-14), *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."* Second is his **personage** (15a), *"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."* Third is his **prominence** (15b), *"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."* Fourth is his **power** (16-17), *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."* Fifth is his **position of authority** (18) *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."* Sixth is His **peace** (20), *"And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."*

Chapter 2 In this chapter, Christ's preeminence is defended. Heresy had broken out in the church at Colossae, misleading some believers. Some were calling for the worship of angels (18), and some a strict observance of Jewish ceremonies (16-21). This heresy was a mixture of Jewish, Greek, and Oriental religions, and all this called forth the statement of the truth of the supreme Lordship of Christ. The philosophies, legalism, and man-made disciplines created great problems for the church. Here is what Paul said about it, *"(Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?"* (21-22). The Jews were trying hard to bind circumcision and the sabbath and other parts of the law on the Christians, to which Paul said, *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his*

cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days" (14-16).

Chapter 3 Christ's preeminence is demonstrated. We must never forget that our strength is in Christ. We learn from this chapter the **position** of the believer (1-4) and also the **practice** of the believer (3:5-4:1). It's not good enough to just put off the old man (5-11), but we must also put on the new man as well (12-17). This chapter begins with some powerful points. We are to seek. *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God"* (1). Seek carries with it the idea of aim, ambition, desire. Set, literally, our mind. We are to set our thinking on things above. *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (2). We have severed our lives from the past. Our being dead and our lives hidden in Christ are both based on His appearing. *"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"* (3-4). In the rest of the chapter Paul discusses different kinds of relationships.

Chapter 4 Christ's preeminence is seen in the development of the church—their Christian conduct (2-6), and their Christian service (7-18). We see the importance of prayer, *"Continue in prayer; and watch in the same with thanksgiving"* (2); especially for others, *"Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak"* (3-4). As the book ends, we see the impact of prayer in walk (5), in words (6), and in the value of Christian examples (7-14). The book closes with Paul's salutations and benediction (15-18).

This epistle draws a faithful portrait of Christ in all His glory and dignity. I came across the following in my notes that I thought was fitting to sum up the book of Colossians: In Romans we are justified in Christ, in First Corinthians we are enriched in Christ, in Second Corinthians we are comforted in Christ, in Galatians we are free in Christ, in Ephesians we are quickened in Christ, in Philippians we are happy in Christ, and in the book of Colossians we are made complete in Christ. The book of Colossians presents the glorious culmination of it all.

An Overview of Philemon

Ben Wright

The letter to Philemon is more personal letter than epistle. In that regard, it is much more akin to Second and Third John than to Romans or some other epistle that Paul was inspired to write. This short letter is filled with direction on how to love a new brother in Christ, Onesimus, who may possibly have stolen from the Christian, Philemon. What makes it even more interesting is that Onesimus was a slave that belonged to Philemon. While today we rightly believe that slavery is repulsive, in the first century, it was extremely common. In fact, it is estimated that there were sixty million slaves in the Roman Empire, which means there were more slaves than non-slaves. Paul did not, by inspiration, command Philemon to free Onesimus from his servitude, but to love him as a brother in Christ. Philemon needed to do this because Paul had converted Onesimus when the young man had come to Rome and somehow came into Paul's sphere of influence.

Two words stand out in this short letter. The first is receive. It is found in verses twelve, fifteen, and seventeen. There are two different Greek words translated receive. The first, found in verses twelve and seventeen, means "to receive into one's home, with the collateral idea of kindness" according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon. The other word, in verse fifteen, carries an idea of having wholly or in full. Taken together, Paul was encouraging Philemon to take Onesimus fully back into his home as more than a slave. Onesimus was now a brother in Christ to Philemon.

The second word that stands out is love. The word is found three times as *love*, and the idea is found one time as *beloved* in this short letter. Paul spoke of the love he had for Philemon, which probably was a result of Paul having helped convert him. Paul also spoke of the love that Philemon had for others and needed to show Onesimus. Finally, Paul described Onesimus as a brother beloved.

This letter shows us the power of the gospel to change lives. Onesimus, a runaway slave, and probable thief, based on verses eighteen and nineteen, had his life changed by the gospel. He became a help to Paul and then was willing to return to his owner, Philemon. A slave that ran away would not have been willing to do either of those things. A Christian, who was striving to please the Lord first and his brethren second, was not just willing, but did so. This letter should help those in sin see that their lives can change in such a way that they can be pleasing to God. This letter should also help those who are Christians to look past the sin of the ones near us and see what they can become, not what they presently are.

This letter also gives insight into how Christianity overcomes the evils of slavery. Some have chided the Lord for not coming out and saying that owning slaves is sinful. If the Lord had done that, Christianity would have been eradicated from the face of the earth by the Roman Empire. If that had been accomplished, there would have been millions of people with no form of income and no home, wandering the streets of the cities of the Roman Empire.

Instead, "love one another as I have loved you" was stated by the Lord (John 13:34). This love, the sacrificial love of Christ that Christians are to imitate, overcame the Roman Empire, and has stamped out slavery wherever true Christianity has been found. If one truly loves his neighbor as commanded, and loves his neighbor like the Lord loves him, there is no way that he could treat anyone as a slave. You may own a person under the law of the land, but you would treat him or her like a brother or sister in Christ. This is what Paul was asking Philemon to do.

Another important lesson that we learn from a study of this short book is the concept of repentance. Onesimus had broken the law by running away from Colossae. It also seems that he had robbed Philemon when he ran. True repentance makes restitution and seeks to restore relationships. Onesimus had to make things right with Philemon. Part of gospel obedience is repentance of sins. Onesimus had to restore what he stole and also restore the relationship he had harmed when he left. Paul understood this, and it is why he sent Onesimus back to Philemon.

Another lesson that is learned from this brief but powerful letter is the need for tact. Oxford Dictionary defines tact as: "adroitness and sensitivity in dealing with others or with difficult issues." This was a sensitive issue because of the times and the widely held view of slavery. Paul showed skill in the way he handled the situation. He was placating to Philemon, acknowledging the man's great love and goodness towards fellow Christians. Paul also reminded Philemon of the love Paul had for him, but also of the indebtedness of Philemon to him for having taught him the gospel. Paul showed the usefulness of Onesimus, and appealed to Philemon's Christ-like character to see his usefulness and accept him as a brother in Christ. Tact is a characteristic that is lacking in many today, and Christians need it in handling situations that arise between brethren.

Philemon is a short letter, but it is, like all inspired writings, very powerful. It gives us a glimpse into the social situations of the everyday life of a person in the Roman Empire. What it does above all else is show us the power of the gospel and the power of love like that of our Lord.

The Setting of Our Suffering

Here I am, ready to be offered.

Here I am, ready to make a stand.

Here I am, ready to be glorified.

There is no need to hide in the Sinless Summerland.

There men fall, burdened by oppression.

There men fall, no power in their hand.

There men fall, alone and unrepentant.

There is no place of safety in the dark and twisted land.

Fear and discontentment,

Or joy and heart's delight.

The Setting of our Suffering

Is the choice 'tween Day and Night.

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ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: What is a euphemism?

ANSWER: A euphemism is a word that is a substitute for another usually more graphic or inconsiderate word. The American Heritage Dictionary defines euphemism as "a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing." The example given is of using "downsizing" to refer to job cuts. We often use euphemisms in our exclamations. Instead of outright cursing or swearing when we stub our toes, we might substitute a word that is less offensive, but still intends to convey the same thing. Instead of directly using God's name in a moment of wonder or surprise, we frequently alter His name into a sound or word that is similar but unrecognizable to the untrained ear. The problem with using euphemisms is not so much in the actual sound that proceeds from our lips, but in the thought that is filling our minds when we utter them. James admits that controlling the tongue is a difficult thing to do (Jam. 3:1-12). Jesus informs us that the words of our mouths reveal the things that abound in our hearts (Mat. 12:34). We may think we are avoiding or preventing ourselves from sinning by substituting a euphemism for an outright "cuss word," but the fact that we can choose to make that substitution indicates that we have the ability to choose our words. The better thing for Christians to do, when in a moment where an exclamation of pain, surprise, or anger approaches our lips, is to choose to say nothing. Silence or a grunt or a sigh would be better than using a euphemism. God's name is holy. Let us not seek to bend or twist it into something less. Bodily functions are private and should not be referred to in mixed company. Let us find more pleasant ways of expressing ourselves. Let us so fill our hearts with goodness and joy that we can refrain our tongues from evil and our lips that they speak no guile (1 Pet. 3:10)

-David Dixon
WOT

The words of *Truth*

The Words of Truth

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