

### Introduction to Philemon

#### Author, Date and Recipients

This is a personal letter from the apostle Paul to Philemon, a wealthy Christian from Colossae. It was also intended to be read to the entire church that met in Philemon's home. It was probably written c. AD 62, during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome ([Acts 27-28](#)).

#### The Gospel in Philemon

The central gospel themes in Paul's shortest letter are surprisingly substantial. Philemon teaches us simply yet profoundly that the gospel transforms us from the inside out. God's grace in the gospel therefore has the power to reconcile people and transform relationships. When a wealthy slave owner and his fugitive slave both encounter the gospel of grace, they are forever changed. Though they were both formerly slaves to sin, they have become prisoners of grace, each learning how to move from being self-centered to becoming other-oriented.

In this way Philemon and Onesimus were following the reconciling footsteps of their Master, the servant Jesus Christ, who "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant" in his incarnation, humble and sinless life, and obedience to death on the cross ([Phil. 2:5-8](#)). This sacrificial service was predicted by Jesus himself, who told his disciples, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" ([Mark 10:43-45](#)).

Because of Jesus, the ultimate reconciler who made peace on the cross ([Col. 1:20](#)), we must let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts in all of our relationships, since we are one body with Christ who is our head ([Col. 3:15](#)). In this way, the gospel will transform us from the inside out, not by compelling us against our will to love one another, but by changing the will itself.

#### Outline

- Greetings (vv. [1-3](#))
- Thanksgiving and Prayer (vv. [4-7](#))
- Paul's Appeal to Philemon for Onesimus (vv. [8-20](#))
- Personal Remarks and Greetings (vv. [21-25](#))

## Introduction to Colossians

### Author, Date and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians living in the small city of Colossae. It was probably written c. AD 62, while Paul was in prison in Rome ([Acts 27-28](#)). This was about the same time he wrote [Ephesians](#) and Philemon.

### The Gospel in Colossians

Of all the books in the Bible, [Colossians](#) may rightly be considered the most Christ-centered. In this short letter Paul goes to great lengths to proclaim the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in all things and for all people. The good news of Christ's lordship over creation as well as his redemption for his people rings forth from start to finish in this epistle.

Paul focuses on these themes because the world, both that of the early Christians and our own, undermines the truth of Christ's supremacy and sufficiency for all of life. In the hearts and minds of unsuspecting Christians, this can cause uncertainty about Christ truly being our all in all. This can lead to doubts about God's sovereignty and salvation, despair when life seems confusing and out of control, and outright destruction of the foundations of our faith.

Paul writes this letter as an effective antidote to these very real dangers. He strengthens our gospel defense by fixing our eyes on who Jesus is. We are strengthened to combat the temptations to capitulate to worldly ambitions and desires, reduce the gospel to mere religious maxims, or separate our belief in Christ from our behavior for Christ.

Throughout the entire letter Paul redirects Christians' often-distracted focus back to Christ, who is the Creator of all things, Savior of all peoples, and Victor over all enemies because of his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. Knowing and focusing on Christ builds a strong defense and forms a strategic offense against enemies both inside and outside the church. As clearly as any book of the Bible, [Colossians](#) rivets us on who Christ is and what he has accomplished—the very motivation and power believers need to live by faith, walk in obedience, and glorify God.

### Outline

- Greeting ([1:1-2](#))
- Thanksgiving ([1:3-8](#))
- Prayer ([1:9-14](#))
- Praise to Christ ([1:15-20](#))
- Reconciliation to God ([1:21-23](#))
- Paul's Labor for the Gospel ([1:24-2:5](#))
- The Dangerous Teaching at Colossae ([2:6-23](#))



## Q4 | Week 9: November 28 – December 3

### Weekly Overview

- The Proper Focus: Christ and the Life Above ([3:1-4](#))
- Instructions on Living the Christian Life ([3:5-4:6](#))
- Personal Greetings and Instructions ([4:7-17](#))
- Closing ([4:18](#))

## Introduction to Ephesians

### Author, Date and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Ephesus and the surrounding region c. AD 62 while imprisoned in Rome ([Acts 28](#)). During this time he also wrote [Colossians](#) and Philemon

### The Gospel in Ephesians

The book of [Ephesians](#) is full of gospel from start to finish. In fact, there may be no other book in all the Bible that packs in as much gospel per square inch. The first half of the book is almost nothing but gospel explanation, while the second half is almost entirely gospel application—mind-boggling indicatives followed by grace-filled (and grace-motivated) imperatives.

The good news of the first three chapters centers on the word “blessing,” specifically all the blessings we have by virtue of union with Christ ([1:3](#)). We were chosen in him ([1:4](#)). We were adopted in him ([1:5](#)). We have redemption in him ([1:7](#)). We have our inheritance in him ([1:11](#)). And in Christ, God is bringing the entire universe to its fulfillment ([1:10](#)). Paul goes on to explain that in Christ, God is exercising his mighty power for us who believe ([1:19](#)). In him, we who were dead in trespasses have been made alive ([2:4-5](#)). In him we have been created for good works ([2:10](#)). In him we who were far away have been brought near ([2:13](#)). In him, long-time enemies can come together in peace ([2:14](#)). In him we are being built together into a dwelling place for God ([2:22](#)).

All of this is ours in Christ Jesus, which is why Paul prays twice that we may know Christ more and more ([1:15-19](#); [3:14-21](#)). In him, we find a love that is wide and long and high and deep ([3:18](#)), a love that will surprise, and a love that surpasses knowledge ([3:19-20](#)).

The glorious gospel in the first half of the book does not fade to the background in the second half. Instead, we see that the good news of chapters 1–3 makes possible, natural, and desirable the good commands of chapters 4–6. Therefore, as God’s beloved ones, we put off falsehood, unrighteous anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, and bitterness. We put on truth-telling, righteous anger, hard work, edifying conversation, and compassion ([4:17-32](#)). Out of love for Christ, wives submit to their husbands ([5:22](#)), children honor their parents ([6:1](#)), and bondservants obey their masters ([6:5](#)). Husbands lay down their lives for their wives ([5:25](#)), fathers instruct their children in the Lord ([6:4](#)), and masters deal kindly with their servants ([6:9](#)). Taking our stand on the love of Christ, we stand our ground against the Devil and resist the schemes of the Evil One ([6:10-18](#)). In Christ we have become holy, and in Christ we can grow in holiness.

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### Weekly Overview

The message of [Ephesians](#) is that when we embrace the love of Christ, we will also embrace the way of life that Christ loves.

#### Outline

- Introduction ([1:1-14](#))
- Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving ([1:15-23](#))
- Salvation by Grace through Faith ([2:1-10](#))
- Unity and the Peace of Christ ([2:11-22](#))
- Revelation of the Gospel Mystery ([3:1-13](#))
- Paul's Prayer for Strength and Insight ([3:14-21](#))
- Unity of the Body of Christ ([4:1-16](#))
- Paul's Testimony ([4:17-24](#))
- Encouragement for a Holy Lifestyle ([4:25-5:2](#))
- New Life in Love ([5:3-21](#))
- Submission to One Another ([5:22-6:9](#))
- The Whole Armor of God ([6:10-20](#))
- Conclusion ([6:21-24](#))

## Introduction to Philippians

### Author, Date and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in the city of Philippi, probably from Rome c. AD 62.

### The Gospel in Philippians

If there ever was a clarion call to rejoice because of the gospel, it is Paul's epistle to the Philippians. Writing from his jail cell in Rome ([1:12-16](#)), Paul calls the Philippian readers to turn their gaze back to the power and joy of the gospel—and particularly their deep fellowship in it—and away from outward circumstances.

By outward appearances, as Paul writes, there is little reason for the Philippian believers to rejoice. Their beloved leader Paul is in jail; they face tremendous opposition from enemies; their church is experiencing rivalry and disunity; one of their key leaders, Epaphroditus, has nearly died twice; and some are subtly teaching confidence in the flesh rather than the cross of Christ. How can they rejoice?

Despite all these circumstances, Paul calls the Philippians to remember the power and joy of the gospel and their secure citizenship in heaven ([1:27](#) [ESV footnote]; [3:20](#)). What matters more than any earthly event is what God is doing as a result of his good news ([1:6](#); [2:9-10](#)). Because of the gospel, and their unity with Christ in it, the Philippians can stand firm ([1:27](#)) in the face of opposition. Paul himself, remembering his longstanding gospel partnership with the Philippians ([1:7](#); [3:14-15](#)), rejoices. Seen through the lens of the gospel, his imprisonment and their suffering are actually, counterintuitively, reasons to rejoice. For such hardships, painful as they are, serve to advance the gospel.

Furthermore, the key to retaining proper gospel perspective and avoiding getting caught up in petty conceit and rivalry is to look to Christ himself. If he humbled himself and made himself nothing, and if God has now exalted him above all, how much more should we be willing to humble ourselves as well? Jesus' example sets the model for servant-humility as a normal part of the Christian life.

Paul's own life ([1:25-26](#); [2:17-18](#); [3:7-17](#)), as well as the lives of Timothy and Epaphroditus ([2:19-30](#)), follow Christ's servant-model of prioritizing the gospel above all else. This prizing of the heavenly includes discounting the emphasis on "the flesh" ([3:1-11](#)) and pressing on to the heavenly prize ([3:12-4:1](#)). Two prime marks of standing firm in the gospel are unity ([4:2-3](#)) and joy ([4:4-7](#)). Paul concludes his letter with further rejoicing and thankfulness for the Philippians' partnership in the gospel ([4:10-23](#)).

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### Weekly Overview

Several sets of key words help us trace the emphases in [Philippians](#). The most obvious are words related to *joy*, which occur 20 times ([1:3-4, 18, 25](#); [2:2, 9, 17-18, 28-29](#); [3:1](#); [4:1, 4, 6, 10](#)). A second key term in [Philippians](#) is *fellowship* (Greek *koinonia*), translated as “partnership” or “participation” ([1:5, 7](#); [2:1](#); [3:10](#); [4:14-15](#)), which can relate either to other believers ([1:5](#); [4:14-15](#)), the gospel of grace ([1:7](#)), or Christ himself ([2:1](#); [3:10](#)). A third key term is *citizenship*, which occurs only twice but is strategically placed ([1:27](#) [ESV footnote]; [3:20](#)). A fourth key expression, “in Christ,” occurs in some form at least nine times, reflecting the spiritual union that gives us status and resources from the Savior in all of life’s circumstances. Finally, of course, are the words for the good news itself: *grace*, which appears three times ([1:2, 7](#); [4:23](#)) and *gospel*, which occurs nine times ([1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27](#) [2x]; [2:22](#); [4:3, 15](#)).

Our union with and unity in Christ are the basis for joyful, humble service—no matter what the circumstances. Paul calls us to stand firm, rejoice, and humbly serve others even as Christ humbly served us through his redemptive work. May we “strain forward” (see [3:13](#)) for the prize of citizenship with Christ—whom God has exalted for universal praise!

### Outline

- Greeting and Prayer ([1:1-11](#))
- Paul’s Reflections on His Imprisonment ([1:12-30](#))
- Encouragement to Humble Service ([2:1-30](#))
- Opponents of the Gospel: Where Does Righteousness Come From? ([3:1-21](#))
- Concluding Encouragement and Thanksgiving ([4:1-23](#))