COLOSSIANS & PHILEMON
A DEVOTED TO THE WORD BIBLE STUDY
COMPiled BY: CLAY GENTRY
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Special thanks to:
The church at Lanton for all of their patience, encouragement and prayers as you have watched me grow over the last six years.

And, to my wife Shelly for her love and support. Without you by my side this trip through life would not be possible.
# COLOSSIANS, PHILEMON:

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Getting the Most Out of This Study

To get the most out of this study of Colossians and Philemon follow these helpful suggestions:

Suggestions for Study Participants and Leaders

1. As you begin each reading, pray to God, asking Him to speak to you through His word.
2. Begin your study of Colossians and Philemon by first reading the Introductions to both Colossians and Philemon (pp. 11-12 and 33-34), then read Colossians and Philemon in your Bible. As a note, the questions in this study incorporate the language of the English Standard Version, so you may wish to use that translation of the Bible for this study.
3. Each reading deals with just one passage, allowing you to delve into the Paul’s meaning in context. Read and re-read the assigned passage, taking note of any observations or questions you might have. These notes make for perfect discussion points in a group setting.
4. This is an inductive Bible study, meaning this book includes three types of questions, observation, interpretation and application questions. Observation questions ask about the basic facts. Interpretation questions delve into the meaning of a passage. Application questions help you discover the how the truth of the text can impact your spiritual life. To get the most from these questions, write your answers in the space provided or in a personal journal. Writing brings clarity and a deeper understanding of God’s word. It will also help you contribute to a group discussion.
5. It is also be a good idea to have reliable Bible study tools at your disposal, such as: a study bible, commentary, bible dictionary, or online resources.
6. If you are a part of a Bible study group it is especially important that you: (1) Come to the study prepared. (2) Be willing to participate in the discussion by sharing your insights. (3) Listen when others describe what they have learned, you will be amazed at what you can gain from others.
7. If you are leading a Bible study group, it is especially important that you: (1) Come to the study thoroughly prepared. (2) Follow the Suggestions for a Typical Group Study below. (3) Encourage participation from everyone.
8. If you need 13 lessons to complete a quarter, then make the first lesson an overview of the Colossians and Philemon.

Suggestions for a Typical Group Study:

1. Begin with prayer, asking for God’s guidance in understanding His word.
2. Have a participant read the assigned passage aloud.
3. Share and discuss any observations or questions anyone has from the assigned reading. Assist one another in answering questions prompted by the reading.
4. Work through the discussion questions for each reading. For most of the questions, there is no one “right” response, so share multiple answers from different group members for each question. Doing this will help the group get to the meaning and application of the passage.
5. End your time together with prayer, asking God for strength to live out His word.
"Jesus is the only way" can be a very unpopular stand for Christians to take in today's world. Granted, the world does not mind Jesus and Christianity so long as it is a lot like Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, New-Age, Zoroastrianism, etc. They do not mind us following Jesus as long as we say following Mohammed, Buddha, Vishnu, and the Dalai Lama will get us to the same place. Efforts to minimize Jesus and fold the Faith into other religious systems are not new. The Colossians dealt with these same threats. When Paul learned about this danger, he wrote the Colossians an epistle defending Christ’s preeminence and His sufficiency to reconcile men to God. Paul’s message is a reminder that believers, both then and now, are complete in Christ.

Author:
Paul identifies himself as the author of Colossians (1:1, 23; 4:18). Timothy also appears as a co-sender with Paul, as he does in 2 Corinthians; Philippians; 1 and 2 Thessalonians; and Philemon. Timothy's role would have been that of an assistant composer and/or as secretary recording Paul’s dictation. However, Paul did take up the pen to write his own personal greeting at the end of the letter (4:18).

Colossians is often grouped with Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon as one of the “Prison Epistles” because in all of them Paul writes from prison (4:3, 10, 18; Ephesians 6:20; Philippians 1:7, 12-26; Philemon 1, 10, 13, 23). While Paul was constantly imprisoned for the faith (2 Corinthians 11:23), the traditional view is that he penned this group of epistles from Rome (Acts 28:17-31). References in Philippians to the “imperial guard” (1:13) and the “saints... of Caesar's household” (4:22) support a Roman imprisonment as the origin of these letters. Furthermore, Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians are connected by the fact that Paul sent all three letters by the hands of Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9; Philemon 10-12; Ephesians 6:21). Additionally, Colossians and Ephesians share several parallel passages. Moreover, the companions Paul list in Colossians (4:9-14, 17) are identical to those in Philemon (1, 2, 10, 23, 24).

Background:
The city of Colossae lay in the Lycus River valley, 100 miles east of Ephesus in modern day Turkey. Colossae had once been a thriving city situated on important east-west, north-south trade routes. However, by Paul's day, it was overshadowed in importance by the neighboring cities of Laodicea (2:1; 4:13, 15-16; Revelation 3:14-22) and Hierapolis (4:13). Although Colossae’s population was mainly Gentile, a great many Jews called the city home. Colossae’s mixed population of Jews and Gentiles manifested itself both in the makeup of the congregation (1:21-23, 27; 2:13, 16-17; 3:11) and in the heresy that plagued it, which contained elements of both Judaism and paganism.

The church at Colossae perhaps had its beginning during Paul’s time at Ephesus (ref. Acts 19:10, 20, 23-27). Paul did not establish the church there, nor had he ever been there (2:1); but a Colossian named Epaphras first preached the gospel there (1:5-8; 4:12-13). Epaphras had undertaken the long trek to Rome presumably to report to Paul the state of the church and the false teaching threatening it (1:8). For some unknown reason he was imprisoned with Paul and was unable to return (Philemon 23). Although the Colossians had not yet totally succumbed to these false teachings (2:1-5), Paul is quick to head off the encroaching heresy or heresies before they ravages the church. Because Paul
does not present a systemic response to the false teachings threatening the church (as he does in Galatians) the exact nature of the heresy is rather hard to pin down. Nevertheless, we can deduce from Paul’s writing that the false teaching(s) did include some elements of Greek philosophy (2:8-10), an extreme form of Judaism (2:11-23), along with references to Oriental mysticism sprinkled in (2:18-23). Circumcision, dietary regulations, ritual observances, asceticism, worship of angels and mystical experiences were all a part of the heresy or heresies attempting to capture the hearts and minds of the saints at Colossae. Any attempt to fit Christ into such false teaching would undermine His nature and redemptive work, along with the unity of believers through Christ (1:20, 28; 3:11, 28).

**Theme:**
The overreaching theme of Colossians is the deity and preeminence of Christ. He is:
- The Head of All Principality and Power (2:10)
- The Creator and Sustainer of All Things (1:16, 17)
- The Author of Reconciliation (1:20-22; 2:13-15)
- The Basis for the Believer’s Hope (1:5, 23, 27)
- The Source of the Believer’s Power for A New Life (1:11, 29)
- The Embodiment of Full Deity (1:15, 19; 2:9)
- The Head of the Church (1:18)
- The Resurrected God-Man (1:18; 3:1)
- The All-Sufficient Savior (1:28; 2:3, 10; 3:1-4)
- Fulfillment of Jewish Law (1:12; 2:17)

**Outline:**
1. Introduction (1:1-2)
2. The Preeminence of Christ In The Life of the Colossians (1:3-14)
   a. Paul’s thanks for the Colossians’ faith in Christ (1:3-8)
   b. Paul’s prayer for the Colossians’ understanding and fruitfulness (1:9-14)
3. The Preeminence Of Christ In His Nature And Work (1:15-23)
   a. The divine nature of Christ (1:15-20)
   b. The glorious work of Christ (1:21-23)
4. Paul’s Ministry In General And For The Colossians (1:24-2:7)
   a. The preeminence of Christ over false religion
   b. The superiority of Christ over false philosophy (2:8-15)
   c. The reality of Christ instead of false worship (2:16-19)
   d. The power of Christ vs. false asceticism (2:20-23)
5. The Preeminence Of Christ In Christian Living (3:1-4:6)
   a. Christ, the foundation of the believer’s life (3:1-4)
   b. The virtues of the believer’s life in Christ (3:5-17)
   c. Christ in relationships (3:18-4:6)
6. Conclusion (4:7-18)
Paul’s Epistle
to the
Colossians
Study #1 - *Greetings (1:1-2); Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:1-14)*

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #1 Questions:

1. Summarize the main point(s) Paul is making in this reading.

2. From this brief introduction, what impresses you most about the Christians at Colossae?

3. In your own words, describe Paul’s...
   a. Thanksgiving for the Colossians (vv. 3-8):

   b. Supplication for the Colossians (vv. 9-14):

4. How does Paul’s prayer in vv. 9-14 relate to the problems the Colossians are facing?

5. Paul was “always” praying for others (i.e. Philippians 1:3-5; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; Philemon 4). What change(s) will you make in your prayer life in order to imitate Paul’s example?
Study #2 - *The Preeminence of Christ* (1:15-23)

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #2 Questions:

1. Summarize the main point(s) Paul is making in this reading.

2. In what ways is Jesus supreme in creation and redemption?

3. How do these words help explain why Jesus alone is the only way to God? (ref. John 14:6)

4. According to Paul, how does the new life of the believer contrast with his/her old life?

5. List the conditions for remaining “holy and blameless and above reproach” (vv. 22-23) before God and explain how these conditions are met. (ref. Ephesians 3:20-21; Philippians 2:12-13)

6. What are some practical changes you will make in your thinking, routine, activities, etc. to reflect the supremacy of Christ in your everyday life?
Study #3 - Paul’s Ministry to the Church (1:24-2:5)

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #3 Questions:

1. Summarize the main point(s) Paul is making in the assigned reading.

2. Why does Paul “rejoice” (v. 24) to suffer for the body of believers? (ref. Philippians 2:17-18)

3. In addition to prayer (1:9-11), what does Paul do to present believers, “mature in Christ” (v. 28)?

4. What is the value of the mystery that Paul says is “now revealed in the saints” (v. 26)? (ref. Romans 16:25-26; Ephesians 3:1-10)

5. How do Paul’s teachings in this passage refute the “plausible arguments” (v. 4) of the false teachings that are troubling the Colossians?

6. Have you ever been fooled into believing plausible-sounding lies regarding Christian living? If so, what was the outcome? If not, how did you discern the falsehood?
Study #4 - *Alive in Christ (2:5-15)*

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #4 Questions:

1. Summarize the main point(s) Paul is making in the assigned reading.

2. How does obedience to the commands in vv. 6-7, give you the power to avoid the false teachings mentioned in v. 8? (ref. 1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 3:14-19; 2 Peter 3:17-18)

3. How is Paul’s description of Christ in vv. 9-10 a powerful deterrent to being taken “captive” (v. 8) by false doctrine? (ref. John 1:14-16; Philippians 2:5-11)

4. Drawing from vv. 11-14, explain the role of baptism in the life of a believer?

5. What is the significance of Paul’s words in vv. 14-15 to the argument that he is making in Colossians?

6. Reread vv. 9-15 again, inserting your name every time Paul says, “you” or “us.” How do these facts about your spiritual state as a believer affect your view of yourself?
In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #5 Questions:

1. Summarize the main point(s) Paul is making in the assigned reading.

2. Why do you think man-made additions to the believer's faith in Christ are so appealing? (ref. Romans 4:2; 1 Timothy 4:1-10)

3. According to Paul, why are these additional rules useless and dangerous?

4. Using vv. 19-20, explain Paul's reasoning for rejecting these man-made religious rules?


6. Of all the false additions to the faith listed by Paul, which one(s) do you find most attractive? What have you learned from this reading about defeating enticing additions?
Study #6 - *Put On the New Self* (3:1-17)

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Reading #6 Questions:

1. Summarize the main point(s) Paul is making in the assigned reading.

2. What reasons and benefits does Paul give for “seek[ing] the things that are above” (v. 1)?

3. List and explain four practical things you can do to “set your mind on things that are above” (v. 2).

4. How does Paul illustrate the believer’s transformation from negative actions to positive actions? (ref. Ephesians 4:17-32)


6. How would your daily activities be different, if your actions were ruled by the words, “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 17)? (i.e. shopping, eating, talking, working, etc.)
Study #7 - Rules for Christian Households (3:18-4:1)

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Reading #7 Questions:

1. Summarize Paul's inspired directives for the following people (ref. Ephesians 5:22-6:9):
   - Wives:
   - Husbands:
   - Children:
   - Fathers:
   - Slaves:
   - Masters:

2. How would a failure to understand the preeminence of Christ in the life of the believer lead to problems in the home?

3. What additional insights for better relationships can you glean from Matthew 7:12; Philippians 2:3-11; 1 John 4:7-21?

4. How do Paul’s instructions to slaves and masters help shape your understanding of how Christians are to act on the job? (ref. 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Peter 2:18-20)

5. In light of this reading, what three actions will you take today to make your home and/or workplace more peaceful, loving and God honoring?
Study #8 - *Further Instructions (4:2-6); Final Greetings (4:7-18)*

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #8 Questions:

1. Summarize the main point(s) Paul is making in the assigned reading.

2. Explain the significance of the three qualities that Paul said should define a godly prayer life.

3. List several ways you might practice the principles of vv. 5-6 in your everyday interactions.

4. Epaphras was an important figure in the life of the church at Colossae and beyond (1:7-8; 4:12-13). In the context of Colossians, how is Epaphras’ prayer particularly appropriate?

5. From Paul’s final greeting, what do you discover about him, or his associates, or the early church, etc.?

6. As you reflect over the spiritual qualities Paul affirms in his greeting, which of these do you wish could be said of you? What will you do to cultivate this desired quality in your life?
Study #9 - *Colossians Review and Reflection*

1. What questions or observations do you have after reading Paul’s epistle to the Colossians?

2. In your own words, briefly describe the purpose of Paul’s writing to the Colossians.

3. Briefly explain the overarching meaning theme of Colossians: *The Preeminence of Christ*.

4. In a sentence or two, summarize how the preeminence of Christ influences the believer’s life.

5. Have you noticed any areas (Christ, false religion, Christian living, etc.) in which you have changed your perspective as a result of studying Colossians? If so, explain.

6. Look back over the questions where you stated a desire to make a change in your life. How have you done on reaching your goal(s)? What further action do you need to take?
Introduction to Philemon

Which do you think is harder: asking for forgiveness, extending forgiveness or being the mediator between these two parties? In a nutshell, that is what the book of Philemon is all about, Paul mediating between the runaway slave Onesimus and the wronged slave owner Philemon. If you blink, you may miss this little jewel of a letter. Coming in at only 25 verses and tucked between Titus and Hebrews it is easy to overlook. However, this little letter is the most personal and practical of all of Paul’s epistles. Paul urges Philemon to forgive and release his former slave Onesimus and welcome him back as a brother in Christ. Through a real-life situation involving two people he loved, Paul teaches all Christians the importance of transformation in Christ and forgiveness.

Author:
Paul identifies himself as the author of Philemon (vv. 1, 9, 19). Timothy also appears as a co-sender with Paul, as he does in 2 Corinthians; Philippians; Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Because of the nature of Philemon and the extensive use of the first person singular through the letter, it appears that Timothy's role would have been that of a secretary recording Paul’s dictation. However, Paul did take up the pen to write his own personal guarantee for Onesimus' debts (vs. 19).

Philemon is often grouped with Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians as one of the "Prison Epistles" because in all of them Paul writes from prison (vv. 1, 10, 13, 23; Ephesians 6:20; Philippians 1:7, 12-26; Colossians 4:3, 10, 18). While Paul was constantly imprisoned for the faith (2 Corinthians 11:23) the traditional view is that he penned this group of epistles from Rome (Acts 28:17-31). References in Philippians to the "imperial guard" (1:13) and the "saints... of Caesar's household" (4:22) support a Roman imprisonment as the origin of these letters. Furthermore, Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians are connected by the fact that Paul sent all three letters by the hands of Tychicus and Onesimus (vv. 10-12; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7-9). Additionally, the companions Paul list in Philemon (1, 2, 10, 23, 24) are identical to those in Colossians (4:9-14, 17).

Background:
Philemon, the recipient of this letter, was a prominent and beloved member at the church in Colossae (vv. 1-2; Colossians 4:9), known for his love for the brethren and the sharing of his faith (vv. 6-7). He was wealthy enough to have a large house (cf. v. 2) and to own at least one slave, a man named Onesimus. At some earlier period, Onesimus stole some valuables or money from Philemon (v. 18) and ran away (v. 15). Like so many runaway slaves, Onesimus fled to Rome to blend in with the populace there. Through circumstances not recorded for us, Onesimus met Paul in Rome and became a Christian (v. 10). The two became close (v. 12b, 16) with Philemon proving himself very useful to Paul (v. 11b, 13). Nevertheless, by stealing and running away from Philemon, Onesimus had broken Roman law and defrauded his master. While he wanted to keep Onesimus in Rome, Paul knew Onesimus needed to deal with his sins toward Philemon and so he sent him back to his master with this letter urging Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother (vv. 15-17) and ultimately free him (vv. 13-14, 21). The historical record indicates that Philemon did indeed receive Onesimus back and did free him. This could be collaborated with the fact that the letter to Philemon is included in our Bibles today.
The world of first century slavery has very little if any parallel with early American slavery. Unlike the race based slave system of early America, Roman slavery was a nonracial institution in which anyone could be slave and could reasonably expect emancipation by the time they reached 30 years of age. Additionally, Roman slaves were not limited to hard labor in fields, but they could be doctors, teachers, household managers, accountants, tradesmen or artisans. Roman slaves owned property and expected to be reasonably cared for with clothing, food and housing, which were guaranteed by Roman law. Because of the poverty of many free men, the economic and living conditions of slaves were often far better. This led many free labors to sell themselves into slavery as a means of economic survival and advancement. Some estimates place the slave population during the first century at a third or more of the total number of person in the empire. Nowhere does the New Testament attack slavery as sinful in and of itself. Instead, God, through His word, addresses the relationship of slaves to their masters and masters to the their slaves (1 Corinthians 7:21-23; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-41; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Peter 2:18-20). All this teaching is undergirded by the fact that “here there is not... slave [or] free; but Christ is all and in all” (Colossians 3:11; cf. Galatians 3:28).

Themes:

- Reconciliation: Because Onesimus is reconciled to God, now he is in the process of being reconciled to a fellow believer he has wronged.
- Forgiveness: Paul is urging Philemon to forgive Onesimus on the basis of love.
- Transformation: Onesimus (meaning useful) was once useless to Philemon, but now he has transformed into a useful brother in Christ.

Outline:

1. Introductory Greetings (1-3)
2. Paul’s Prayer For Philemon (4-7)
3. Paul’s Plea To Philemon (8-21)
   a. The authority behind the plea (8-9)
   b. The person involved in the plea (10-11)
   c. The explanation necessary for the plea (12-14)
   d. The providence behind the plea (15-16)
   e. The content of the plea (17-20)
   f. The confidence of acceptance of the plea (21)
4. Final Request, Greetings, and Closing Blessing (22-25)
Paul’s Epistle to Philemon
Study #10 - *Greeting (1-3); Philemon’s Love and Faith (4-7)*

In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #10 Questions:

1. After reading Philemon, how would you reconstruct the events that lead up to this epistle?

2. From what you know about Philemon, write a brief character sketch of this godly man.

3. How does Paul’s prayer for Philemon reflect the situation with Onesimus?

4. What lesson(s) do you learn from Paul’s example of telling people that he is praying for them and the content of his prayers? (ref. 1 Corinthians 1:4-8; Ephesians 1:15-23; Philippians 1:3-11)

5. How would the teachings of Colossians 3:1-14, 22-41 affect the situation addressed in Philemon?

6. What aspects of Philemon’s character would you most like to develop in your life?
In the space below, write any observations or questions you have regarding the assigned reading.
Study #11 Questions:

1. Describe the significance of how Paul identifies himself with Onesimus.

2. What arguments does Paul put forth for why Philemon should forgive, accept, and release Onesimus?

3. With Matthew 18:21-35 as a backdrop, answer the following questions:
   a. What will be required of Onesimus to return to Philemon?
   b. What will be required of Philemon to do as Paul requested?

4. How does Paul’s willingness to accept Onesimus’ penalty, reflect Christ’s mediation for believers?

5. How is Paul’s mentioning of Mark, a powerful example for Philemon to follow? (ref. Act 15:38-40; Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11)
Study #12 - Philemon Review and Reflection

1. What questions or observations do you still have after reading Paul’s letter to Philemon?

2. In your own words, detail the purpose of Paul’s letter to Philemon.

3. How would you explain first century slavery and Paul’s teachings on the issue to someone?

4. Briefly explain how Paul addresses the themes of:
   - Reconciliation -
   - Forgiveness -
   - Love -
   - Transformation of Believers -

5. Summarize in one or two sentences the most significant lessons you learned from your study of Philemon.