

THE BIG READ (12)

Jesus in Colossians & Philemon

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. After the four Gospels that tell the story of Jesus’ earthly life, and Acts which traces the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, the remainder of the New Testament is made up of epistles or letters that were sent to individual Christians or churches.

These letters address specific situations in the lives of believers and through them we are taught how to live as God’s people.

3. Colossians and Philemon, like Ephesians and Philippians are prison letters written by the apostle Paul.

Paul wrote them during his imprisonment in Rome in the early AD60s.

“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.” (Colossians 4:3)

“My fellow-prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.”
(Colossians 4:10)

“I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.”
(Colossians 4:18)

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother.” (Philemon 1)

“Yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul – an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.” (Philemon 9)

B. Why did Paul write these letters?

1. During Paul’s third missionary journey, he stayed in Ephesus for about 3 years, preaching the gospel and building up the church.

“All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of Lord.” (Acts 19:10)

Among those who heard the gospel and were saved, was a man called Epaphras who was from a small town called Colosse.

Epaphras returned home to Colosse and began preaching the gospel there, and some people believed the good news and a church was formed.

“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf.” (Colossians 1:6-7)

2. Epaphras wasn't the only person from the town of Colosse to be converted as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

A man called Philemon also heard the good news and believed in Jesus.

"I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will pay it back – not to mention that you owe me your very self." (Philemon 19)

When Philemon returned home, he must have made contact with Epaphras and the small church in Colosse, because by the time Paul wrote the letter of Philemon, the church was meeting in his home.

"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." (Philemon 1-2)

Epaphras and Philemon were two of the leaders of the church in Colosse.

3. Philemon had a household slave called Onesimus.

"Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother." (Philemon 15-16)

At some point after Philemon became a Christian, Onesimus had run away from his master, possibly stealing something from him.

"If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me." (Philemon 18)

Hiding out in Rome, Onesimus met the apostle Paul, heard the gospel, and became a follower of Jesus.

"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains." (Philemon 10)

"He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here." (Colossians 4:9)

4. While Paul was in prison, Epaphras came to visit him.

He shares some encouraging news about the church in Colosse.

"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you." (Colossians 1:3-6)

But he also tells Paul some worrying news that there were false teachers prowling around, who were saying that Jesus is not enough, and that the Colossian Christians were being made to feel like they were missing out on something.

"I tell you this so that no-one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments." (Colossians 2:4)

"See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." (Colossians 2:8)

"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day." (Colossians 2:16)

"Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you from the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unscriptural mind puffs him up with idle notions." (Colossians 2:18)

"Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!""? These are all

1. The big theme of Philemon, which is the shortest letter that Paul wrote, is forgiveness.

There is someone who needs to be forgiven.

There is someone who needs to be forgiving.

2. Onesimus is the one who needs to be forgiven.

He is a runaway slave who may have stolen something from his master Philemon.

Onesimus meets Paul, hears the gospel, is converted, and becomes a great blessing to Paul (evidence that his conversion is genuine).

“Formerly he was useless to you, but he has become useful both to you and to me.” (Philemon 11)

“I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.” (Philemon 13)

Onesimus has been forgiven by God but needs to be forgiven by Philemon.

3. Philemon is the one who needs to be forgiving.

Philemon is to welcome Onesimus.

“So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.” (Philemon 17)

Philemon is to transfer the debt Onesimus owes to Paul.

“If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back – not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit to you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.” (Philemon 18-21)

Philemon is to demonstrate that he’s forgiven him – by caring for Onesimus – because Paul is going to check in on him.

“And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.” (Philemon 22)

By forgiving Onesimus, Philemon will have a greater understanding of what God has done for Him in Christ.

D. Jesus in Colossians & Philemon

1. Jesus is the sufficient God.

He is the image of the invisible God.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” (Colossians 1:15)

He is the Creator.

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” (Colossians 1:16)

He is the Sustainer.

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:17)

He is the Saviour.

"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14)

"For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Colossians 1:19-20)

He is the Head of the church.

"And he is head of the body, the church." (Colossians 1:18)

He is the Transformer.

"Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." (Colossians 2:23)

"and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." (Colossians 3:10)

He is our hope.

"To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)

He is supreme.

"He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." (Colossians 1:18)

Colossians teaches us that in Christ we have everything we need to become a Christian and grow as a Christian, so don't get tired of Jesus and don't turn from Jesus to other things.

2. Jesus is the forgiving God.

By forgiving and restoring Onesimus, Philemon gives us a tiny picture of what God has done for us through Jesus.

We have runaway from Him and stolen from Him.

Yet through Christ, God forgives us and welcomes us back into His family.

Philemon teaches us about our need for forgiveness and how God has forgiven us in Jesus.