

# HOME STUDY



Winter Quarter

December | January

February 2023-24

# Home Study

WINTER QUARTER

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# Letters from Prison

BRIAN BURKE

Our studies this winter, largely drawn from the Prison Epistles, emphasize doctrinal issues (teachings about Christ), but they also contain much practical application (living out the faith). We call them prison epistles because the apostle Paul wrote to the churches during his first imprisonment in Rome under Emperor Nero. Nero's was the first major persecution of Christians by a Roman emperor.

We will see how closely doctrine and practice are linked together as Paul explicitly joins the two with the word "therefore" twenty times within these letters. In Colossians 2:6, the general principle that doctrine shapes practice is definitively stated: "As ye have *therefore* received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (emphasis added). In order to receive Christ, we must, of course, believe certain truths about Him. That is why what we believe and what we do are so interlocked.

Paul, as a prisoner of the state, was able through his letters to give practical examples of how belief plays out in life. We see it in how he deals with Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, and with Philemon himself, giving a demonstration of redemption and calling for forgiveness. Modeling what Christ our Substitute did for us, Paul urged Philemon, upon his slave's return, to accept him as he would Paul—and charge any wrongs or debts to Paul's account.

Conversely, we'll see Paul combat-

ing sub-Christian error, heresy, and unsound doctrine—all having consequences for Christian practice—when he warns the Colossians not to let any man "beguile you of your reward" (Col. 2:18). Doctrine has implications built into it. We might ask, for instance, "If Christ is wholly sufficient, why would I have to abstain from certain foods or be circumcised to be justified?" or "If Christ has supremacy over all, why would I appeal to angels?"

In this context, we'll learn about the sufficiency of Christ. Was His life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of the Father sufficient for our justification and our sanctification? Or must we continue to embrace the Old Testament legal and sacrificial system, which Paul will show us Christ superseded? The completed work of Christ is our completion. Even our good works, says Paul, are ordered by God that we might walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

Paul explicitly declares that those whom God calls and justifies He sanctifies and glorifies. Paul emphasizes a different aspect of that chain of redemption depending upon the needs of the congregation he is addressing. Some needed encouragement, some correction, and some rebuke. And Christ is sufficient for all those needs.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul highlights Christ's supremacy by declaring that God has made Christ to be Head over all things for the church (1:22). His

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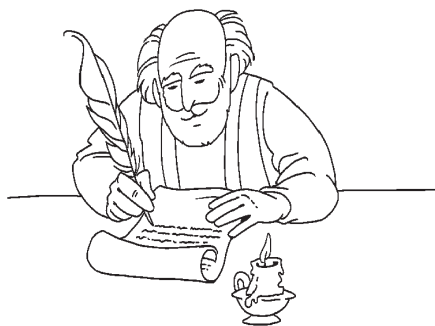
supremacy and enthronement, though encompassing all of creation, was (and is) primarily for the benefit of the church. And in His supremacy, Jesus perfectly fulfills the Old Testament offices of prophet, priest, and king. He speaks His Word to us as our Prophet; He intercedes in heaven for us as our Priest; and He protects us as our King.

As our lessons unfold, we'll see how the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ counters all opposition to our great salvation—a salvation that nothing can be added to or subtracted from. Christ's sufficiency is manifested in a fulfilled and contented Christian. We are exhorted to walk in the light. This new life in Christ should manifest itself in good works and a transformation of social relationships.

We will witness examples of apostolic composure ("I have learned . . . to be content" [Phil. 4:11]) during Paul's times of adversity, even the worst kinds of adversity. The more adverse the life circumstances, the more they became useful for Paul (cf. 1:12). They made him stronger for the sake of the churches and the proclamation of the gospel (cf. II Cor. 12:10).

As we move through the weeks, we'll see a progression from general to more specific doctrine and practical exhortation. Paul wrote to address particular situations, good or bad, in the churches and to provide general encouragement. And Paul's teaching was consistent; for instance, we see his exhortation to Christian husbands to love their wives, and wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord," with almost identical wording in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

Paul provides specific instruction about our works by describing Christian conduct in the home, in the church (both in its offices and spiritual gifts), and in the workplace. He presents the Christian's spiritual armor—the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salva-



tion—to aid us in our life's journey (Eph. 6). With this armor properly donned, we can ward off all the spiritual and doctrinal assaults the enemy will throw at us. We need not fear his attacks or devices because the One who dwells within us is immeasurably greater than he is. But we cannot become complacent and think we can face the devil on our own.

Unity is a common theme of Paul. Unity is brought about by the reconciling of all things in and through Christ, seen most beautifully and completely in the new covenant inclusion of the Gentiles into the church together with the Jews. We are called upon to maintain unity in the church, the family, and in our work relationships as much as it lies within us.

Our studies end with Paul's letter about slavery and redemption and payment of the debt we owe to God as sin-cursed people. How and why did Paul relate his teachings to his own predicament as a prisoner under Roman arrest? Paul often referred to himself as a bondsman for Christ. The important thing to remember and emphasize this winter is that Paul modeled what he was teaching in his epistles. Christian witness becomes much more effective and powerful when others see our good works and glorify God because of them.

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**PHIL. 1:12** But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things *which happened* unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

**13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;**

14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

**15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:**

16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

**17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.**

18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

**19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your**

**prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,**

20 According to my earnest expectation and *my* hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether *it be* by life, or by death.

**21 For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.**

22 But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

**23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:**

24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh *is* more needful for you.

**25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;**

26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

### NOTES

# To Live Is Christ

Lesson Text: Philippians 1:12-26

Related Scriptures: Acts 28:11-16, 30-31; I Corinthians 3:5-9;  
II Corinthians 5:1-9; II Timothy 4:6-8

TIME: A.D. 60-61

PLACE: from Rome

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—“In nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:20).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

The book of Philippians is a treatise on the subject of joy. It is, more specifically, a treatise on the subject of joy in the midst of adversity. Paul did not address the Christians in Philippi from some ivory tower. When he wrote to them about joy in the midst of adversity, he wrote as one personally experiencing the very phenomenon of which he wrote.

Paul wrote to the Philippians while he was awaiting trial under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30). Paul wrote to express his joy in life and his gratitude for the gift the Philippians had sent to him via Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25). Paul had established the church in Philippi, which was in Macedonia (northern Greece), about ten years prior to the writing of this letter.

Philippi was the first place on the European continent in which Paul preached. Its believers remained very dear to his heart (Phil. 1:8). He feared that his situation might dishearten them; so he wrote to reassure them and strengthen their faith. He wanted them to rejoice and stand firm despite persecution. They needed unity to support one another in tough times.

### **THE MESSENGER'S INCARCERATION—Phil. 1:12-14**

**God's will (Phil. 1:12).** When we hear of someone we love who is in some kind of difficulty, we become concerned about him or her. Such was the case with the Philippian Christians. They knew Paul was being held prisoner, and they worried about him. Paul, however, would not entertain such pessimism. They were not to worry about him. What was happening to him was for the “furtherance of the gospel.” God was still in control. Paul was confident that God had him right where He wanted him!

**Caesar's house (Phil. 1:13).** The believers were not to despair for Paul. During his house arrest, he was guarded by an elite squad of Roman soldiers who also worked in Caesar's palace. They were called the Praetorian Guard. Paul had a captive audience and took full advantage! We read in 4:22 that Paul sent greetings from all the saints and especially from those in Caesar's household. We can conclude, then, that Paul successfully proclaimed the gospel and saw people converted to Christ even in Caesar's house. Yes,