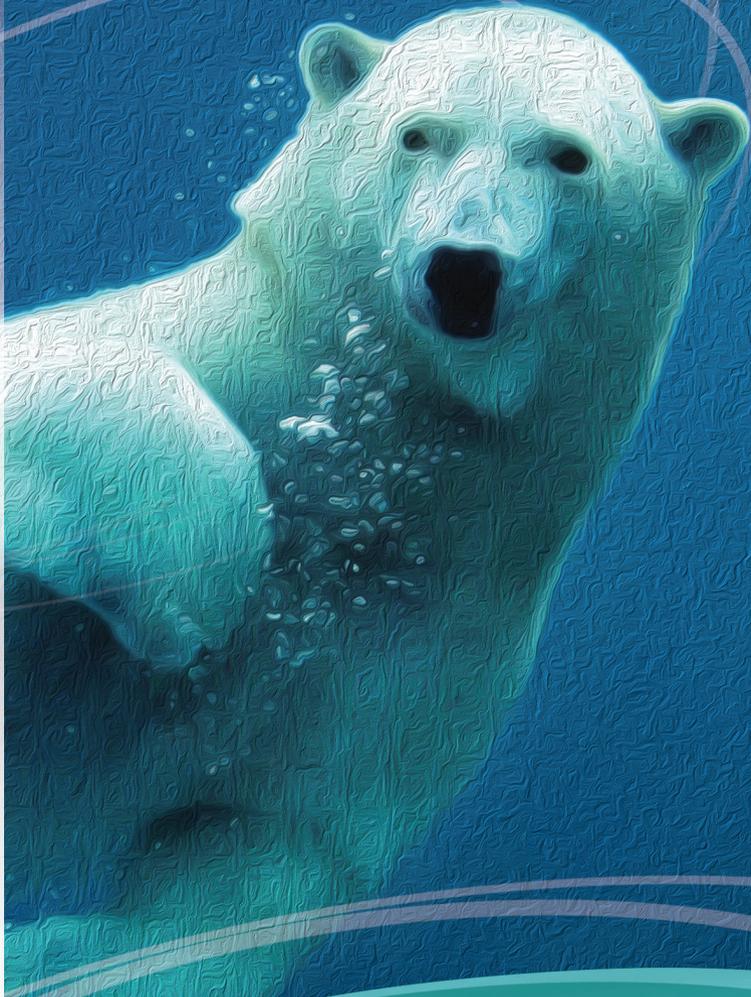


SUNDAY
SCHOOL *Superintendent*



Winter Quarter
December | January
February 2023-24

Sunday School Superintendent

WINTER QUARTER

December 2023, January, February 2024

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Editorials

BY BRIAN BURKE

Paul's Predicament?

Our lessons this quarter draw from the Prison Epistles, which are heavy on doctrine (teachings about Christ), especially Ephesians and Colossians. But they also contain much practical Christianity (living out the faith), and they make clear how these two elements are related to each other. Paul explicitly joins Christian practice to Christian doctrine 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). There is an intimate link between doctrine and practice; that’s why Paul keeps them linked and fights against any teaching, especially as we will see in Colossians, that would undermine that link.

Paul, a prisoner of the state, actively demonstrated the intimate link between doctrine and practice while he was writing to the churches. We see it in how he deals with Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave, and with Philemon himself, in a demonstration of redemption and a call for forgiveness. Modeling what Christ our Sub-

stitute did for us, Paul tells Philemon that upon his slave’s return, he should accept him as he would Paul—and charge any wrongs or debts to Paul’s account. Luther called Philemon, “a right noble, lovely example of Christian love” (*Unger, New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody).

Paul fought against sub-Christian errors, heresies, and unsound doctrines—all having consequences for Christian practice—when he warned the Colossians not to let any man beguile them of their reward. Paul was combating a mindset that “sought to reduce Christianity to a legal system and Christ to the position of a lesser god” (Unger). 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 talk about the sufficiency of Christ, the supremacy of Christ, and the fullness of Christ. We will see what this means for our redemption, the doctrine of the church, and practical Christian living.

We will witness an example of

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apostolic composure (“I have learned . . . to be content” [Phil. 4:11]) during times of adversity, even the worst kinds of adversity. God intended that His people should witness this (vs. 9). Jesus said to Ananias about Paul, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake (Acts 9:16). The more adverse the life circumstances, the more they became useful for Paul (Phil. 1:12). They made him stronger for the sake of the churches and the Lord’s work (cf. II Cor. 12:10).

As we move through the quarter, 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 or to provide general encouragement. We must build our doctrinal edifice from the teachings that are given to us.

Paul wrote the Prison Epistles over a period of a few years in a sequence that’s not always clear, but his doctrine must be studied as a unity and applied for use by individual Christians and the churches. One example of this is seen in 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.

As the quarter unfolds, 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 (His completed work), “having made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20), 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 were chosen in Christ to walk in good works (Eph. 2:10).

Paul provides specifics about these good works as he describes Christian conduct in the home, in the church (both in its offices and spiritual gifts), and in the workplace. He presents the Christian’s armor to aid us in this walk. With it we can ward off spiritual and doctrinal assaults.

Unity is a common theme of Paul. Unity is brought about by the reconciling of all things in and to Christ, seen most beautifully and completely in the new covenant inclusion of the Gentiles into the church along with the Jews. Christ made one new man (Eph. 2:15). 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 quarter ends with what was mentioned above: Paul’s letter about slavery and redemption and payment of the debt we owed to God as sin-cursed people. He related his teachings to his own predicament as a prisoner under Roman arrest. Paul often referred to himself as a bondsman for Christ.

A crucially important thing to remember and emphasize this quarter is that Paul modeled what he was teaching in his epistles. Christian witness becomes much more effective and powerful when others clearly see our good works and glorify God because of them.

To Live Is Christ

Lesson Text: Philippians 1:12-26

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).

OPENING MOMENTS

Suggested Song (Adults)

“Living for Jesus” (Chisholm)

Suggested Song (Children)

“All for Jesus” (Simpson)

Icebreaker

Is your walk with Christ apparent enough to others who know you that they would call you a Christian?

LESSON OUTLINE

1. **Boldness in chains**
(Phil. 1:12-13)
2. **Christ is preached**
(Phil. 1:14-18)
3. **By life or death**
(Phil. 1:19-26)

KEY ISSUES

The title of this week’s lesson, “Living to Please Christ,” expresses clearly the essence of what it means to be a Christian. The title “Christian” was first used, perhaps in derision, to indicate a person who talks like Christ, walks like Christ, holds the same views as Christ, and does everything as Christ would (Acts 11:26).

The person called a Christian was to live in such a way that Christ dominated every moment, every action,

every thought, and every word. Others could not encounter that individual without encountering Christ. Friends could not think of him without thinking of Christ.

In this lesson we see how the apostle Paul deserved the title “Christian” and how he encouraged the believers at Philippi to live the same way. We too should walk worthy of Christ.

As we study this lesson, let us determine to live to please Christ this week and for the rest of our lives. One of the most important ways in which we can do this is by understanding what is most important and valuable. The believer in Christ recognizes, as Paul did, that having a relationship with Him outweighs every other consideration or concern.

Life or death—what does it matter as long as we are in Christ and He is in us, glorifying Himself? Paul lived according to this truth, as we should too. When by God’s grace we grasp this truth, the worries and resentments that can so easily govern our lives begin to fade away. We recognize more fully that Christ is directing our lives, and this knowledge far outweighs the hardships of our present circumstances.

The believers in Philippi were aware of Paul’s two years of imprisonment in Caesarea, his perilous sea