

# **A PASSAGE THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT**

## *Part Seven “The Prison Epistles”*



*by J.S. Smith*



# The Prison Epistles

Author: Paul • 61-64 A.D.

## Ephesians

The book is addressed to the saints in Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia in the first century. She was surrounded by mountains and the sea and intimate with Greek trade, art and science. Ephesus was the famed home of the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world. The temple was 425 feet long by 225 feet wide and supported by 127 marble columns, 60 feet high.

Ephesus was a point of travel convergence along a communication line stretching from Rome to the East. The church at Ephesus traces its start to the sixteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The Holy Spirit hindered Paul from speaking in Asia on his second missionary journey. After taking the gospel to Europe, Paul made a quick visit to Ephesus (Acts 18:19) with Priscilla and Aquila who stayed on there for several years after Paul's departure.

The author is the apostle Paul. In the spring of 54 A.D., Paul came back to Ephesus and joined Priscilla and Aquila.

The purpose of this epistle does not seem to be occasioned by any special circumstances or outstanding event. Rather, it seems to be a convenient opportunity for Paul to correspond with his beloved brethren at Ephesus. A large part of this missive is about unity. Paul did not want to see or engender a split among Jewish churches and Gentile churches. There was but one church.

## Philippians

The book is addressed to the church in Philippi. The gospel was first preached in Europe by Paul on his second preaching tour here. The church at Philippi was established by Paul and Silas.

The author is the apostle Paul, who was led by the Spirit to Macedonia and initially to Philippi, the capital. He met Lydia of Thyatira, a seller of purple, in Asia Minor and helped in her conversion. The new sister welcomed the preachers into her home. Paul then cast out a spirit of divination from a damsel which led her employer to order him cast into prison. An earthquake from God freed them and the jailer was subsequently converted with his family. Paul was released and left the city in Acts 16.

The purpose of this epistle originates with evidence that the letter was written from Rome. Paul was in bonds among the palace guard (1:13-14) and brings greetings from Caesar's household (4:22). The letter was evidently penned prior to the burning of Rome in 64 A.D. based upon the lack of mention of this momentous event in the letter. Surely, his condition after the fire could not be reconciled with his current favorable circumstances. The Roman historian Tacitus recounts this event and how Nero blamed the conflagration on the Christians in the realm. There arose a great persecution in which Eusebius notes Paul's martyrdom (*Ecclesiastical History*, 80).



Paul wrote to inform them of his welfare. Paul finds little reason for reproof as he writes for they were holding to the truth and had touched him with their fellowship in his work elsewhere.

## Colossians and Philemon

The book is addressed to the church at Colosse. Colosse was located in the southern part of Asia Minor. She was known as an important meeting place between east and west. The population of Colosse

was largely Phrygian but there was also present a mixture of Greeks and Jews and a constant stream of international visitors with new ideas. In the years that soon followed the completion of this epistle, the cities of Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis were greatly damaged by an earthquake. Colosse recovered and became known for opulence but later died out again. The church at Colosse was possibly begun at the preaching of Paul, Timothy and Silas as told in Acts 15:39-16:6. Philemon was a resident.

The purpose of Colossians begins with the occasion for Paul to refute and eliminate all this false teaching going on in Colosse. The first three chapters are forceful arguments against Judaism, philosophy, asceticism and carnality. The closing chapter is composed of a final charge and farewell messages.

The purpose of Philemon is that Paul is taking occasion to send a personal letter to a brother in Colosse along with the general epistle to the church there. Its recipient, Philemon is apparently associated personally with Paul as the subject of the letter, Onesimus, has become in Rome. The latter is mentioned in closing the Colossian letter as a peripatetic member of that church which, when connected with Epaphras in both letters, makes the conclusion simple.

# Lesson 1: The Mystery of His Will

Ephesians 1:1-23

1. (1:1-13) This paragraph is abused often by Calvinistic teachers to claim that God predestined some men to be saved and others to be damned and that there is nothing man can do in the interest of his salvation. This is called “unconditional salvation.” We will examine this paragraph to determine whether or not it teaches “unconditional salvation.” Does verse 4 say that some were chosen in Christ before a certain time? Does it determine whether or not this choice was conditional or unconditional? In the same verse, for what were they chosen?

2. Paul, an apostle mentions the mystery of God’s will. Refer to 3:3-6 and note the answer in verse 6: what is the mystery of God’s will that is now revealed? By whom is it now revealed?

3. To whom, then, does the fore-ordination in chapter one refer?

4. (1:13-14) Who is the earnest of our inheritance in Christ? Did the Ephesian Christians have miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit? Since you do not, how is the Holy Spirit an earnest to you?

5. (1:15-23) Compare verse 17 to 2 Peter 3:18, 2 Timothy 2:15 and Hebrews 5:12-14. Is spiritual growth important? How is it accomplished?

6. According to verses 19-20, how did God display his power in Christ? Will God also do this for those who believe?

7. What position does Christ occupy in the church? Find scriptures that teach that Christ shares this position with anyone else.

## Lesson 2: By Grace Through Faith

Ephesians 2:1-22

1. (2:1-7) These first three verses also plunge a stake into Calvinism's heart. Paul addresses these Gentile Christians who before were in what condition?
2. (2:8-10) What is grace? Whose is it here? Whose is the faith?
3. Salvation is not of works—what works?
4. Does this mean faith, confession, baptism and service are unnecessary to salvation?
5. What does James say about faith and works in James 2:14-20? Which do you believe is right—James or Paul?

6. Paul says more on the subject in Titus 3:3-8. It was by God's mercy and not by "works of righteousness which we have done" by which we were justified (verse 5). Still, those who believe in God should be "careful to maintain good works" (verse 8). Are works important or not?

7. (2:11-13) How are Gentiles (or anyone outside of Christ for that matter) described in this passage before their conversions?

8. (2:14-18) What is the end of the racial division that was present in Old Covenant times? How do you think Jews might have received verse 18?

9. (2:19-22) What is the household of God?

10. Was the house built upon sand or rock? What of a house, or church, built upon the teachings and name of a man?



## Lesson 3: The Church in Christ

Ephesians 3:1-21

1. (3:1-7) Explain how Paul was a prisoner of Christ. Was he unhappy about his position?
2. This mystery is not so because it is difficult to understand, but because it had not yet been revealed. How is the mystery revealed?
3. The mystery is said to have involved the Gentiles (verse 1). How does verse 6 touch upon this? How is this blessing conferred on man?
4. (3:8-13) Summarize 1 Corinthians 15:9 and 1 Timothy 1:12-15.
5. What did Paul tell his brethren in Philippians 2:17? Apply this sentiment to Ephesians 3:13.

6. (3:14-21) What do these related passages teach?

- 1 Timothy 3:16:
- Ephesians 3:5:
- Hebrews 5:12-14:
- Romans 10:17:

7. How do Christ and the Spirit dwell in us?

8. What is the power that works in us?

9. Who deserves the glory in the church? Do I? Does any man?

# Lesson 4: The Growth of the Body

Ephesians 4:1-32

1. (4:1-6) Paul uses “the walk” of life metaphorically throughout this epistle to describe the conduct of life of every Christian. How can one “...walk worthily of (his) calling...”?

2. With what three qualities are we to forbear one another? Find scriptures that discuss each quality.

3. Which one is the scripturally authorized basis for unity and fellowship:

good intentions  
diverse teachings  
Biblical confusion

reputations  
the doctrine of Christ

4. List the seven ones and then how some try to make two or more of them:

**THERE IS ONE:**

**THE WORLD'S EXPANSION**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

5. (4:7-16) Verse 7 probably refers to the giving of miraculous gifts in a lesser measure than was given to Christ and the apostles. The recipients of these in the first century are listed in verses 11-12. For what reason, according to verses 12-13?

6. When Jesus was resurrected and ascended, he conquered what foe, according to 1 Corinthians 15:50-57? Compare to Hebrews 2:14-15.

7. By what means do we gain the ability to discern doctrine and grow up spiritually?

8. (4:17-24) Are his readers Gentiles in the flesh? Are they Gentiles in the faith? Compare this warning to that in Philippians 3:18-19: what is the end of those who worship at their own altar?

9. How much room does Paul allow a Christian to commit sin with security?

10. (4:25-29) List the four sins that Paul quickly condemns:

- verse 25:
- verse 26:
- verse 28:
- verse 29:

11. (4:30-32) Describe the office of the Holy Spirit in our redemption. How do we grieve Him? How do we please Him?

# Lesson 5: Learning to Walk

Ephesians 5:1-33

1. (5:1-7) Are the assertions of this passage commands of God or simply suggestions? This is not a trick question!

2. Here we have a command given to disciples and the example which they are to emulate. We are to be followers of God as dear children and what else?

3. By contrast, some things are not to be named among the saints. List and define them:

4. For what reason are these sins not to be named among the saints, according to verse 5?

5. Verse 6 speaks to the modern Romans 14 revisionist. What is their end and how should we relate to them?

6. (5:8-14) There was a time when these saints walked in the fruits of darkness, but that time is now far passed. Refer to Romans 13:11-14. Shall we continue in sin or permit our brethren to continue in sin unchecked?

7. If a brother is living with a woman to whom he is not married and refuses to repent, shall we continue to have fellowship with him? If not, what should we do with the unfruitful works of darkness?

8. (5:15-21) Verse 19 tells us much about the way in which we are to offer the fruit of our lips to God (Heb. 13:15). Our musical worship is composed of “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in (Greek, τῆ; with) your heart.” What instrument is authorized by this passage?

9. Compare verse 21 to Philippians 2:3-4. How are we to submit to our brethren? Shall we submit to sinful desires?

10. (5:22-33) With what example is a man to follow in treating his wife? How is he to love his wife? How is the wife to treat her husband?

# Lesson 6: An Obedient Soldier

Ephesians 6:1-24

1. (6:1-4) This paragraph really seems to be a continuation of the discussion begun in chapter five on the family. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord, for this is right. Do you think the phrase “in the Lord” limits the commanded obedience of a child to a parent? If so, how? Compare to Luke 14:26-27.

2. Should children be disciplined? If so, is there a limit?

3. (6:5-9) The relationship between servants and masters here is equivalent to that of employers and employees in our day. What is eye service? On the contrary, how should employees view their work?

4. (6:10-17) With what are we to clothe ourselves as we stand against the wiles of the devil (verse 11)?

5. Specifically, list below each part of the armor of God:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

6. (6:18-20) How ought a preacher proclaim the gospel?

7. (6:21-24) Is Tychicus spoken of elsewhere? If so, where?



# Lesson 7: Paul's Joy Despite Suffering

Philippians 1:1-30

1. (1:1-2) In the letters we have studied, Paul generally makes note of his apostleship in the opening. Why do you think he omits that mention here?
2. (1:3-11) With what tone does Paul begin this letter? Is it a dissatisfied and correcting tone like in 1 Corinthians or is it noticeably different? Why do you think this is?
3. Paul is thankful for the Philippians' fellowship with him in the gospel. Define Biblical fellowship. What were some of the products of this fellowship told in 4:14, 4:15, 2:26, 1:19 and 1:4?
4. To whom does Paul give the credit for their conversion in verse 6? Refer to 2:12-13 and 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. Does this support or contradict verse 6?
5. Paul's prayer in verse 9 is a particularly valuable one. What is man's part in accomplishing this goal (Acts 17:11)? Compare verse 10 to 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and 1 John 4:1-3—what responsibility should Christians or a local church exercise in examining teachings and teachers?
6. Examine the list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Would these qualify as "fruits of righteousness?" What are they? Give a very brief definition of each one.
7. (1:12-18) Ever the optimist, Paul finds a silver lining in this dark cloud. What is the dark cloud? What is the silver lining?

8. How concerned was Paul about those who had positioned themselves as his rivals? What was his overriding attitude?

9. (1:19-26) Explain what Paul means in verse 21.

10. (1:27-30) Describe the conduct Paul commanded among the Christians in Philippi.

## Lesson 8: Paul's Joy in Serving God

Philippians 2:1-30

1. (2:1-4) This paragraph is closely related to the previous one which commanded a oneness of mind in verse 27. If we are truly one with Christ and the Holy Spirit, can we be "like minded?" Verse 1 speaks of our fellowship with the Spirit. How should that fellowship affect our unity?

2. What are some practical ways in which you can follow the teaching in verses 3-4?

3. (2:5-11) Jesus is our supreme example of this selflessness. What did he give up for you and me? To what point did he go to serve us? What position does He occupy now?

4. Does this passage imply that Jesus was not deity, but only man while here?

5. (2:12-18) Verse 12 is actually a key to the joy Paul feels at their condition. The Philippians obeyed first in Paul's presence, but now also in his absence. How does a man work out his own salvation with fear and trembling"? Does he do that with God or apart from God? Must one do this or can he "let go and let God"?

6. Paul says that he will "rejoice in the day of Christ" if they become "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke" by, among other things, doing "all things" how?

7. (2:19-24) Give some reasons why was Paul planning to send Timothy to Philippi?

8. (2:25-30) Who was being sent now? How does Paul describe him?

9. How are we to hold men who labor in the Lord's vineyard?

# Lesson 9: Paul's Joy in Christ

Philippians 3:1-4:23

1. (3:1-11) The Jews used the term “dogs” to refer to the Gentiles whom they held in contempt. How is the canine reference used here? Who are the evil workers? Use the context. Define what Paul means by “the concision.”

2. Paul seems to throw off the importance of his physical circumcision in favor of what? Refer to Colossians 2:11-12 and describe the process there.

3. How does Paul regard his earthly record and accomplishments? What was his impression of his life in Christ?

4. (3:12-16) Consider all Paul had done in service to God: Don't you think he had done enough by now?

5. Compare verse 14 with 2 Timothy 4:8. How is the prize described there? For whom is it reserved?

6. (3:17-4:1) We usually think of marking in the Bible as negative (Titus 3:10-11). Here it is for what positive reasons?

7. Those who are not so marked are just as obvious in their deficiency. Paul tells them that they are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” What are their gods and on what are their minds?

8. This passage had to do with the resurrection when our desire to be at home in heaven will be realized. Refer to these passages and summarize what they say about the resurrection.

## **PASSAGE**

- Phil. 3:21
- 1 Cor. 15:42-44
- 1 Cor. 15:50-53

## **DESCRIPTION OF RESURRECTION**

9. Paul says, "Therefore" in 4:1. That means he is directing their attention to what he has just said about the resurrection to Heaven. What is his command in this interest?

10. (4:2-7) Many problems in a local church begin as this one seems to have. The church was being disturbed by two sisters with unnamed differences. What attitudes must we exhibit to overcome these differences and live peacefully?

11. (4:8-9) There is a prescription for a troubled or failing heart in this paragraph. What type of influences are we to have upon our minds according to verse 8? What type according to verse 9?

12. (4:10-20) Paul turns now to thank them for their fellowship with him in the preaching of the gospel. How did the Philippians have fellowship with Paul?

# Lesson 10: Christ is Superior to All

Colossians 1:1-29

1. (1:1-2) How does Paul describe the audience to which he writes this letter? This is a challenge: what is the root of the first of these words and what does it imply?

2. (1:3-8) By what means did the Colossians come to know of Christ and attain faith? By what means did they become the recipients of God's grace?

3. (1:9-12) What three things does verse 9 say are necessary to have a walk worthy of the Lord? What do Ephesians 3:4 and 5:15-17 add?

4. Is the apprehension of God's knowledge automatic and immediately complete for man? If not, how is it described in verse 10?

5. (1:13-18) What is outside the kingdom of Christ and who holds dominion over those remaining there? What benefits are found inside the kingdom, according to verses 13-14?

6. According to this passage and the rest of the Bible, was Christ from eternity or is he a created being? Find other passages to support your answer.

7. How many bodies and heads are there? Find Biblical authority for a Catholic papacy and a Mormon presidency.

8. (1:19-23) This passage talks of the making of peace. Between what two parties was peace attained through Christ, according to this passage?

9. According to verse 22, what is a goal of the Lord concerning His children? Would there seem to be any conditions, according to verse 23?

10. (1:24-29) Verse 28 is a most, wonderful and yet often overlooked statement of purpose. What does Paul preach? How does Paul preach? Toward what goal does Paul preach?



# Lesson 11: Superior to Human Theology

Colossians 2:1-23

1. (2:1-10) What other church is mentioned in this passage? She is noted in many places, but according to Revelation 3:14-19, what became of her a few decades after Paul wrote this missive?
2. We find Paul writing to warn about false teachers. How do verses 4 and 8 describe the efforts of the false teachers? Does this sound familiar?
3. One of the false teachings in the first century is making a comeback in the late twentieth with the writings of a number of popular authors—angel worship. Compare verses 9-10 with verse 18 and Hebrews 1:4. Is the elevation of the angels in our minds to a place corresponding to Christ's the wisdom of God?
4. (2:11-15) The circumcision of the Israelites had been physical; the circumcision of spiritual Israel is what?
5. What is to be done with the old man of the flesh and sin at baptism? Is that garment ever to be put back on again?

6. When does this circumcision take place?

7. How did Jesus triumph in disarming the rulers and make a spectacle of them?

8. (2:16-23) The objects and events listed in verse 16 were a part of what code? Are Christians bound to keep those? Refer to back to verse 14. Why?

9. One characteristic of the false teachers was that they took delight in a false humility. How do you think this would have made them even more dangerous than a proud and boisterous false teacher?

10. What intrusion was evidence that their humility was false?

11. Some of these ordinances in verse 21 live on today in different denominations through events like the Catholic Lent. What does Paul say is their appearance and value?

# Lesson 12: The New Man

Colossians 3:1-4:18

1. (3:1-11) One often hears clichés like “mind in the gutter” or “head in the clouds.” Where is a Christian’s mind to be centered? Is it sinful to center it somewhere else?

2. In verses 5 and 8, there are a number of things which are described as characteristic of a person’s old sinful man. Make a list of these things and be certain you understand what each of them is.

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| a. | f. |
| b. | g. |
| c. | h. |
| d. | i. |
| e. | j. |

3. (3:12-17) Verses 12-3 details a garment to be put on in place of the old one discussed in question 2. What are its attributes? Be prepared to discuss each.

4. In following Christ’s example of forgiveness, does He require anything before granting forgiveness? Is he kind and patient or hateful at the time?

5. While Ephesians lists singing as a means to praise God, this passage adds another function to singing. What is it?

6. Is there anything we can do which Jesus has condemned? Is there anything we can do that would violate a principle of Jesus's teaching? If there is something in our lives that we can not do in His name, may we do it anyway?

7. (3:18-21) List the command given to each of the following and the practical phrase connected with them in this passage that teaches on a godly home:

<b>COMMAND TO:</b>	<b>PRACTICAL PHRASE</b>
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- wives
- husbands
- children
- fathers

8. (3:22-4:1) This passage regulates the relationship of a servant to his master. In this enlightened era of freedom, this passage still holds import as it will also regulate the relationship of employer to employee. Generally, how are servants to behave?

9. What will be the outcome of the wrong-doer?

10. (4:2-6) What are to be some characteristics of prayer?

11. (4:7-18) What is the mission of Tychicus and Onesimus? What is Onesimus's hometown?

14. Evidently the Colossians had known of the problem Paul had with Mark. What was that problem, according to Acts 13:13 and 15:36-41? What had been the result of Paul's seemingly harsh treatment of Mark?

# Lesson 13: Paul's Epistle to Philemon

Philemon 1-25

1. (1-3) In what city was Archippus laboring?
2. (4-7) With what commendations does Paul praise Philemon?
3. (8-16) What had been the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon before? What happened to Onesimus after he ran away?
4. What did Paul want Philemon to do with Onesimus?
5. (17-22) What offer does Paul make if Philemon holds Onesimus in debt? How do you think Philemon would react to this offer?
6. What is Paul's hope for future travel?





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J.S. Smith  
Fort Worth, Texas  
Electronic Mail: [jeffssmith@mac.com](mailto:jeffssmith@mac.com)  
Internet: [www.electronicgospel.org](http://www.electronicgospel.org)  
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