

ROAD TRIP 7



The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

**RON
JONES**



The Ultimate
Road Trip Through
the Bible

ROAD TRIP 7
The Pauline Epistles

RON JONES





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ROUTE 66: THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE BIBLE

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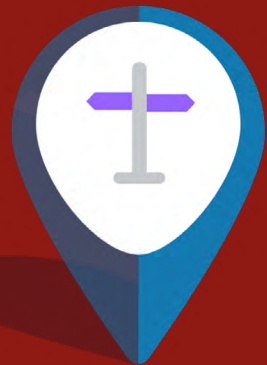
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Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Whether you are a seasoned student of the Holy Scriptures or picking up this best-selling book of all time for the first time, get ready for the ride of your life. As your driver along the biblical Route 66, I promise to watch my speed and obey most traffic laws. However, on this seventh road trip, be prepared. We will certainly encounter some road construction along the ancient paths.

The Bible is a collection of holy writ and divine books—sixty-six of them! There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, the Book of books is one story with one main character, the Christ who was to come in the Old Testament and the Christ who came, Jesus, in the New Testament. Therefore, along Route 66, I will make the Christ connection in each Old Testament book and point you to the Jesus juncture in each New Testament book. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son and our Redeemer.

For a book written over the span of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors on three continents and in three different languages, the Bible possesses an amazing continuity. That continuity is one of the arguments made for the Bible's divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The human authors God chose to pen the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments vary significantly in their background, culture, education, occupation, social status, and ability. They were farmers, fishermen, priests, physicians, politicians, kings, and shepherds. God even used a tax collector to write a biography of His Son, Jesus.

If you enjoy literature, you will love the Bible. Holy Scripture contains every form of literature known in academia, including

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poetry, proverb, history, narrative, law, biography, parable, prophetic, apocalyptic, gospel, and letter. Many colleges and universities offer a literature course on the Bible. What other book on the planet inspires people to study it for its literary genius alone?

God used visions and dreams, angels, clay tablets, burning bushes, face-to-face encounters, the spoken and written word, and the jawbone of a donkey to communicate with those He created in His image. He did so because He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

How does one explain so many people over a long period of time writing about God, history, religious life, and more, and yet doing so in perfect editorial harmony, each adding to the overall story? There is only one plausible explanation. The superintending mind of God inspired the writing of these books across many centuries and pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

A well-respected Bible scholar named Norman Geisler writes, “Note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things. There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ. ... There is one message: Humankind’s problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ.”¹

The Pauline Epistles

Thirteen letters written by the Apostle Paul (also Saul of Tarsus) form a significant library in the New Testament known as the Pauline Epistles. The fact that these foundational documents of Christianity are letters, not catechisms or dry theological theses, is significant and

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unique among the world religions.

Letter writing conveys warmth, passion, energy, and freshness that is missing in a theological textbook or formal statement of faith. The author's personality also emerges in an epistle. The fact that Paul writes most of his letters to a church or pastor means the Pauline Epistles deliver Christian doctrine in the context of real, life-giving congregations of people who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, love God and people, serve one another, enjoy biblical community, and live out their faith authentically. A personal epistle is the best way for a thoughtful and pastoral theologian to deliver the doctrines of our living faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ.

In the order in which they appear in the Bible's New Testament, the Pauline Epistles include Romans, First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians, First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Smaller collections within the Pauline Epistles include the Pastoral Epistles (First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus) and the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).

Pauline Theology (not to be confused with "Pauline Christianity"—the unbiblical idea that Paul's New Testament teaching conflicts with the Gospels) forms our understanding of justification by faith, sanctification, glorification, redemption, and reconciliation—all of it in perfect harmony with all Scripture, which is "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Paul, the apostle of grace, also addresses thorny theological ideas like predestination, election, and foreknowledge. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul waxes eloquently on the deity and humanity of Jesus

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Christ, judgement seat of Christ, and glorious two-stage return of Jesus Messiah at the end of the age, beginning with the Rapture of the Church. He writes plainly about salvation, the church, and the Christian life.

As useful as this travel guide might be, my words are no replacement for reading the Bible itself. My prayer is that you will fall in love with the Bible as much as I have. More so, I pray that you will deeply desire a relationship with its Author. He wrote you a love letter with more than six hundred thousand words because He loves you more than you can imagine.

Are you ready to begin traveling through the Pauline Epistles? Climb in, buckle up, and enjoy the ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

DR. RON JONES

Virginia Beach, Virginia

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Romans

THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

Approaching the book of Romans on the ultimate road trip through the Bible reminds me of a Jones family vacation. Years ago, Cathryn and I drove with the kids to the Grand Canyon from Phoenix, Arizona, where we had been enjoying a few Major League Baseball spring training games in the Cactus League. The four-hour drive was relatively flat and uneventful. Then we arrived at this gaping hole in the earth known as the Grand Canyon. As canyons go, the Grand Canyon is truly grand. Nothing compares to seeing it with your own eyes. A thousand pictures of the Grand Canyon do not come close to capturing its beauty, mystery, and elegance.

The same could be said about the book of Romans, which is the Grand Canyon of the Christian faith. Like the Grand Canyon, Romans is deep and wide and sometimes mysterious. While it challenges the strongest aspects of our stubborn intellect, it will also make us humble and weepy. John MacArthur says Romans “will strip you naked and then clothe you with eternal elegance.”² Paul’s letter to the Romans is so grand that it could be called “the Christian manifesto.”

Romans, which Paul penned near the end of his stay in Corinth



Romans

THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

(57-58 A.D.), has left its mark on some great people throughout church history like Augustine, John Wesley, Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and others. For example, Martin Luther, the Roman Catholic monk who sparked the Protestant Reformation, said Romans is “the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest gospel.”³ John Calvin accessed the power of Romans by saying, “When anyone gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture.”⁴

Though Romans can be intimidating to read, it helps to unfold the book topically and theologically to see the big picture: Sin (1-3), salvation (4-5), sanctification (6-8), sovereignty (9-11), and service (12-16). Like from the south rim of the Grand Canyon, here is another grand view of Romans: Doctrine (1-8), Dispensation (9-11), and Duty (12-16).

After expressing his eagerness to preach the gospel in Rome (1:1-15), Paul summarizes his case by saying, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (1:16-17). Next to John 3:16, no words in the Bible do a better job of stating the overall message of salvation. Let’s dig deeper.

All Have Sinned

Like an oncologist who tells his patient that she has stage four

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is the second Adam, through whom salvation comes.

BIG IDEA

The just shall live by faith in Christ alone.

MEMORY VERSE

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

ROMANS 1:16

AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul
57-58 A.D.



cancer, Paul begins his formal argument for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by diagnosing the human problem. His description of the total depravity of humankind in 1:18-32 is sobering, declaring “for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (1:18).

Paul argues that Gentiles are “without excuse” because they suppress the truth made known to them by God in creation and their conscience. Accordingly, rejecting the knowledge of God, which is plain to see in the natural world, is enough to convict guilty sinners. Paul uses the haunting phrase “God gave them up” three times as a way of describing what eventually happens to truth suppressors. Allowing the natural consequences of living without Him to fall upon humans, God gave them up to impurity (1:24-25), dishonorable sexual passions (1:26-27), and a debased mind (1:28-32).

In 2:1-3:8, Paul turns his attention to the Jews, making the case that they need salvation as much as the Gentiles do. He argues that God’s judgment is truthful (2:2-5), takes deeds into consideration (2:6-10), and “does not show favoritism” (2:11-16). He gives the religious person no hope of gaining God’s favor based upon his personal morality. Furthermore, Paul states without equivocation, there is no special advantage to being a Jew, especially if the Jew does not obey God’s law (2:17-3:8).

Paul summarizes the divine verdict on all humans by saying, “None is righteous, no, not one” (3:10), and “for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). A proper diagnosis of our sin condition sets us up to hear God’s remedy.

Justification by Faith

The typical Torah-loving Jew or religious person might find



Paul's statement in 3:28 is stunning, "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." However, this is the core of Paul's message in Romans and transitions his argument to the next section of the book, which describes God's provision for humankind's sin problem (4-5).

In chapter 4, Paul illustrates justification by faith, starting with Abraham, the father of faith (4:1-8). He reminds us of what the Scripture says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). He also points out that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised in case anyone thought the work of circumcision made him right with God (4:9-12). Paul drives the point home further by saying, "For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be the heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (4:13-16).

But what does Paul mean by the righteousness of faith? Is he talking about faith in faith, faith in the goodwill of humanity, or faith in oneself? He means none of the above. The faith that justifies us before God, he argues, must have the right object (4:13-16). Thus, Abraham's faith in God, not his works, made him right with God.

How does Abraham's experience relate to us? Paul writes, "But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:23-25). In other words, faith alone in the finished work of Christ on the cross makes us right with God, too.

In chapter 5, Paul transitions to a discussion about the benefits of justification by faith (5:1-11), including peace with God, access to God's grace, hope in God, strength of character, and the Holy Spirit who fills us with love and joy. Then he brings Adam into the discussion (5:12-25). Yes, Adam!



Romans

THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

The great apostle begins by showing that death entered the world through one man's sin. Death is not the result of the law, but of Adam's sin. All are sinners because we inherited Adam's sin nature, which theologians refer to as original sin.⁵ Likewise, many are righteous through faith in Christ, also known as imputed righteousness.

Alive with Christ

In chapter 6, Paul begins speaking about believers—those who are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ—and how the process of sanctification takes place.⁶ The next major section of the book, Romans 6-8, is foundational to our understanding of the spiritual life. Paul talks about how believers are delivered from the mastery of sin, free to live under God's grace, and victorious through the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷

The words “know,” “consider,” and “present” are keys that unlock the understanding of Romans 6:1-14. Paul wants the believer in Christ to know he is dead to the principle of sin. He asks, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” He responds with the strongest negation possible in the Greek language, translated, “By no means!” Instead, Paul argues that “we know” we are dead to sin but alive with Christ.

Consider this to be true, like an accountant that confidently calculates the bottom line. Then, “let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions ... present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life” (6:11-14).

In chapter 7, Paul presents the believer as free from the law (7:1-6) before describing his personal struggle to live the Christian life successfully in his own strength (7:7-25). The apostle sounds like he has fallen into Bunyan's Slough of Despond when he writes, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24).



The answer comes resoundingly in the next verse—“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (7:25)—and sets the reader up for chapter 8, which introduces the Holy Spirit’s necessary role in sanctification.

Chapter 8 begins with these comforting words, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” The Holy Spirit indwells and empowers believers in Jesus Christ to live His life successfully. Specifically, Paul argues that all true believers have the Holy Spirit (8:5-11). But the larger question is this: Does the Holy Spirit have you? (8:12-17). Then, the apostle raises his rhetoric by comparing the sufferings of this life to the future glory (8:18-25), showing us how the Spirit “helps us in our weaknesses” (8:26-30), and reminding believers that we are “more than conquerors” (8:30-39).

Faithful to His Promises

Romans 9-11 has puzzled many Bible students. Why would Paul include a lengthy dissertation about Israel and the sovereignty of God in his epistle to the Romans? Remember, Paul is making a case for the gospel of Jesus Christ, “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16). Therefore, how God is demonstrating His sovereignty and faithfulness to Israel is an important consideration. The apostle to the Gentiles argues that since God is and will be faithful to keep the promises He made to Israel, we can trust Him, too.

To even the casual gospel observer, it certainly appears that God turned away from Israel. But did God reject Israel, or did Israel reject her Messiah? Paul argues the latter, starting with a discussion about Israel’s past and how God sovereignly chose the seed of Abraham through Isaac, not Ishmael, and through Jacob, not Esau. (9:1-24). Also, though salvation came from the Jews, it was never for the Jews only (9:25-33; Genesis 12:1-3).



In chapter 10, Paul moves from Israel's past to her present. He begins by repeating his deep desire for Israel to return to God (10:1-4, compared with 9:1-3), and then makes this important point about salvation: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (10:4). Quoting Isaiah, Paul agrees that those who preach the good news of Jesus Christ have beautiful feet. However, he expresses the Lord's deep disappointment with disobedient Israel (10:14-21).

In chapter 11, Paul returns to the question, "Has God rejected Israel?" and repeats the strong response in Greek, "By no means!" He presents himself and Elijah as examples of the remnant God always chooses (11:1-10) and the Gentiles as branches He grafted into the spiritual olive tree (11:11-24). As for God's chosen people, "a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (11:25).

Paul concludes this mysterious section of Scripture with a doxology about "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (11:33-36). I picture the apostle tossing his hands upward in worship and exclaiming, "Some things about our sovereign God even I don't fully understand!"

Living Sacrifices

In the final section of the book (12-16), Paul applies Christian theology to everyday life. Doctrine becomes duty, and belief transitions into behavior. Faith finds expression in practical ways, starting with the apostle urging believers to present their physical bodies to the Lord as a "living sacrifice," proving the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (12:1-2). Then, Paul moves to a discussion about spiritual gifts (12:3-8) and the marks of a true Christian (12:9-21).

Service to God and others dominates Paul's heart and pen.



He makes the connection between our relationship to God and governing authorities (13:1-7) and how love fulfills the entire law (13:8-14). When it comes to exercising one's Christian liberty, love is also the governing principle (14:1-23). Love limits our liberty and leadership. We should not exercise our Christian liberty in a way that causes a weaker brother or sister in Christ to stumble. Jesus Christ is the supreme example of surrendering one's liberty for the sake of others (15:1-7).

Paul reaffirms his ministry to the Gentiles (15:14-21) and revisits his longing to visit the Roman church in person (15:22-33). He finishes his Grand Canyon-like epistle by greeting sixteen people by name (16:1-23) and then closes with an uplifting benediction (16:24-27).

On the Jones family drive from Phoenix, Arizona, to the Grand Canyon, there was no shortcut. However, on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, there is a shortcut through Paul's epistle to the Romans called the Romans Road, which begins with some bad news in 3:23, "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God."

The bad news gets worse in 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death," meaning both physical death and eternal separation from God, also called the second death (Revelation 20:14). However, the bad news turns into good news as 6:23 continues, "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Romans Road continues with two more turns toward salvation. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9) and "for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (10:13).



Romans

THE CHRISTIAN MANIFESTO

OUTLINE	1-3	4-5	6-8	9-11	12-16
FOCUS	Sin	Salvation	Sanctification	Sovereignty	Service
KEY VERSE	1:16	5:1	8:1	10:13	12:1
FOCUS	Doctrine			Dispensation	Duty



1 Corinthians

BODY LIFE

The state of California is known for sunshine, surfing, and Beach Boys music, which made us “wish they all could be California girls.” Today, left-wing politics and loose living also characterize the Golden State. For example, Showtime, the premium television network, captured the modern California spirit in a comedy-drama called *Californication*, which lasted for seven self-indulgent seasons.

Two thousand years ago, a significant Greek city called Corinth had a similar immoral reputation. Ancient Corinth offered something for every known sinful desire, making the word *Korinthiazomai* (“to be like a Corinthian”) synonymous with notorious evil, debauchery, and prostitution.⁸ However, the pure gospel of Jesus Christ was made for a city like Corinth. Thus, the apostle Paul and others planted a church in Corinth, but they found it difficult to keep Corinth out of the church. Sound familiar? What part of your life looks more like Corinth and California than Christ?

Located on a narrow strip of land between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, Corinth was a port city that drew people from various places around the world. Some stayed for a short time to



1 Corinthians

BODY LIFE

enjoy the hedonistic vibe, while as many as seven hundred thousand others made Corinth their home. Corinthians enjoyed the theater, the Isthmus Games (one of the Panhellenic Games and a precursor to the Olympics), and the great temple of Aphrodite with one thousand prostitutes to aid worshippers.

The Apostle Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17). There, he met Aquila and Priscilla, an Italian couple who escaped the persecution of Claudius, and made tents with them to support his living. Paul also preached the gospel in the synagogue until abusive opposition from the Jews forced him to move to the “house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God” (18:7). “From now on,” Paul said, “I will go to the Gentiles” (18:6). After a vision from the Lord encouraging him to “keep on speaking,” Paul remained in Corinth for another eighteen months.

Paul wrote three letters to the Corinthians, of which the first is lost (5:9).⁹ In the Bible, First Corinthians is a second letter Paul wrote from Ephesus during his third missionary journey in response to disturbing news he heard about the church and their many questions about life in the body of Christ. First Corinthians unfolds as follows: Body life divisions (1-4), body life disorder (4-5), and body life discussions about a variety of topics (7-16). Let’s take a closer look at Paul’s letter “to the church of God that is in Corinth” (1:2).

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption from God.

BIG IDEA

Carnality in Christians will tear a church apart and must be corrected.

MEMORY VERSE

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 CORINTHIANS
6:19-20

AUTHOR and DATE

Paul
55 A.D.



1 Corinthians

BODY LIFE

Body Life Divisions

Paul received some bad news from Chloe’s people that factions within the church were quarreling (1:11). People had divided into camps that followed various leaders—namely, Paul, Apollos, and Peter. Before we get into the debauchery in the Corinthian church, divisions abound. Such divisions are the sign of an immature church. Perhaps some followed Paul because he founded the church. Others might have been drawn to the eloquence of Apollos. Loyalists to Judaism probably leaned toward Peter, also called Cephas. Some said, “I follow Christ,” with their spiritual noses in the air.

It should never be a spiritual leader’s goal to do anything more than serve God and His people faithfully. Paul never suggests that he or his ministry colleagues did anything intentionally to attract a following or compete for the affections of the Corinthians. On the contrary, Paul says, “I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name” (1:14-15). They humbly served the church.

It does not take long for Paul to put the cross of Jesus Christ at the center of his letter. The cross of Christ would be emptied of its power (1:17) if Paul, Apollos, or Peter had accepted the celebrity status given to them by the Corinthians, which Paul found to be completely unacceptable.

Paul declares, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1:18). Contextually, Paul leaves us with the distinct impression that the best way to unite the body of Christ is to fix our eyes on His cross. The apostle goes on to show how God put His wisdom on display by choosing “what is foolish in the world to shame the wise” and “what is weak in the world to shame the strong” (1:27). He silences human boasting by choosing “what is low and despised in the world,



1 Corinthians

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even things that are not” (1:28). Then, he points the divided church to Jesus, “who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1:30). When the church goes low, the apostle to the gentiles goes high.

Lest the Corinthians devolve into a preaching contest between Paul, Apollos, Peter, and some sophisticated Greek elocutionists, Paul sets the record straight. “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:1-2). Paul’s point? As simple as it sounded to the worldly-wise Greeks, the crucified Christ is enough.

Unlike the Greeks, Paul did not rely on human wisdom to persuade the Corinthians. Instead, he says, “My speech and my message were ... in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (2:4-5). Paul’s discussion about the Spirit “who searches everything, even the depths of God” (2:10), sets up some of the most direct words he writes to the Corinthians, telling them they are “of the flesh, as infants in Christ (3:1). He differentiates between the spiritual, natural, and carnal (fleshy) person (2:14-3:4). Paul views himself and his ministry colleagues as servants, not celebrities, builders, not the foundation, and stewards of the mysteries of God, not owners (3:5-4:7).

Furthermore, Paul says, “We are fools for Christ’s sake” (4:10). He urges the cosmopolitan Corinthians to “be imitators of me” (4:18). Later, he says, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (11:1 NIV).

Body Life Disorder

Chapter 5 begins with a shocking statement about an immoral relationship in the Corinthian church. Paul writes, “It is actually



1 Corinthians

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reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among the pagans, for a man has his father's wife" (5:1). Rewind that verse and reread it. Let it sink into your soul. It is appalling enough when professing Christians fall into sexual immorality, but some wickedness leaves even the unbelieving world aghast.

Before we are too hard on the Corinthian church, let's understand from where they came. Unlike the Jerusalem church that had a short walk from Judaism to Christianity, the Corinthian believers came out of paganism and Greek mythology. They also lived in unholy Corinth, not Jerusalem, the holy city. Frankly, it was harder to follow Christ in Corinth, though not impossible, which is why Paul addressed the immoral relationship.

Paul instructs the Corinthians to exercise church discipline by expelling the sinful couple from the local body of believers, saying, "You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (5:5). In other words, by not allowing the sinful man access to the sweet fellowship of the church, he is left alone to deal with the devil. Paul chastises the Corinthians for their boasting and then highlights the seriousness of the matter by saying, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (5:6-8).

In chapter 6, Paul uses his apostolic authority to address another disorder in the church (6:1-8). Apparently, believers in Christ were filing lawsuits against their own brothers and sisters in the Lord. How dare you do this, Paul bellows. Again, as the church goes low, the apostle goes high. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!" (6:2-3). Believers should arbitrate their conflicts within the Christian community.

Paul ends chapter 6 by returning to the subject of sexual



1 Corinthians

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immorality (6:9-20), encouraging them to flee from it because “the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (6:13). The apostle elevates the Corinthians’ understanding of their bodies by asking, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (6:19-20).

Body Life Discussions

In chapters 7-16, Paul exercises his apostolic authority by answering a series of difficult questions raised by the Corinthians. First, he addresses issues relating to marriage, divorce, remarriage, singleness, and celibacy (7:1-40). He encourages the Corinthians to live as God called them.

In chapters 8-11:1, Paul addresses how Christians should exercise their liberty in Christ. For example, should Christians eat meat in the marketplace that was previously offered to a pagan god in the temple? Paul argues that meat is meat, whether it was offered in a pagan worship service or not. However, love limits our liberty.¹⁰ Believers should always consider the weaker brother or sister in Christ who might stumble over the free exercise of one’s liberty (see also, Romans 14). Paul’s motivation for surrendering his rights is clear when he says, “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some” (9:22). He also urges us to consider the glory of God, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (10:31).¹¹

Paul transitions to the subject of public worship in 11:2-14:40, while inserting a soaring chapter on love that stands alone as the greatest literary masterpiece ever written on the subject (13:1-13). Love is the Christian ethic that helped the Corinthian believers



1 Corinthians

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navigate their way through the thorny issues that threatened to divide them, specifically relating to the role of women in the church (11:2-26), practicing the Lord's Supper (11:17-33), spiritual gifts (12:1-31), and speaking in tongues (14:1-40).

Of course, nothing should unite believers more than the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is why Paul returns to the subject in chapter 15, where he begins with these profound words,

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. 15:1-3

The gospel is of “first importance.” In other words, the other matters Paul addressed in his letter are important but secondary, and they should not divide the church. After stating the facts of the gospel, Paul mentions the many post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Then, like a capable defense attorney, he proceeds to defend the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, making it the lynchpin of Christianity. “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (15:13-14).

In his great discourse on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Paul answers the following questions: Will the dead rise? (15:12-34), how will the dead rise? (15:35-49), and when will the dead rise? (15:50-56). Considering the certainty of the resurrection of the dead, Paul declares victory over death through the Lord Jesus Christ and urges the following practical application, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (15:58).



1 Corinthians

BODY LIFE

Paul concludes his first letter to the Corinthians by addressing questions about their financial stewardship. He urges them to give regularly and systematically, preparing their offering “upon the first day of the week” (16:1-4). Then, he gets personal by communicating his travel plans (16:5-11) and mentioning the names of six people within some final instructions and greetings (16:12-24).

Despite their many problems and the challenges of their ministry context, Paul still refers to the Corinthian believers as “saints” and includes them among “those sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1:2). He urges them to live up to their high and holy calling, so they look more like Christ than Corinth, and so we look more like Christ than California.

OUTLINE	1 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 16
FOCUS	Body Life Divisions	Body Life Disorder	Body Life Discussions
KEY VERSE	1:17	6:19-20	13:13



2 Corinthians

A DEFENSE OF MINISTRY

Vocational ministry is not for the faint-hearted, which is why God's call must be settled in the heart of a pastor or missionary. Sometimes, even lay leaders discover that church life is fraught with many dangers, toils, and snares. In his second letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul reluctantly boasts about the ministry challenges he faced.

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? 11:24-29

Danger! Danger! Are you ready to sign up for ministry? Serving the Lord can be a dangerous endeavor, as the Apostle Paul makes



2 Corinthians

**A DEFENSE
OF MINISTRY**

abundantly clear from his personal experience. Our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible features Paul's humble but powerful defense of his ministry to the Corinthians.

Second Corinthians is the most personal and autobiographical epistle Paul wrote. In Romans, Paul soars theologically, while in his Corinthian letters, the great apostle displays his missionary heart and pastoral skills. He loves the Corinthians, but he also grieves how false apostles from Jerusalem crept into the church and undermined his apostolic authority, turning the Corinthians away from the "spiritual father" who introduced them to Christ.

After he penned 1 Corinthians, Paul learned that some of the problems he had addressed persisted while more difficulties arose (2:1, 12:14, 13:1-2). For example, false teachers arrived in Corinth and convinced some in the congregation that Paul was dishonest, unimpressive, and unqualified to serve as an apostle. Paul sent Titus to deal with the situation and report back to him. When he had not heard from Titus, Paul traveled to Troas and then Macedonia to find him (2:12-13, 7:5-16). Titus delivered a mostly positive report, encouraging Paul that a majority of the Corinthians now supported his leadership. However, a small opposition led by a group of loyal Jews known as the Judaizers remained.

From Macedonia, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to thank the majority for their support and to make a personal appeal to the minority. While Paul's overall tone in 1 Corinthians is disciplinary, his posture in 2 Corinthians is defensive. Thus, in 2 Corinthians, the

JESUS JUNCTURE

We boast in the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

BIG IDEA

Follow Jesus in humility and generosity.

MEMORY VERSE

"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

2 CORINTHIANS
10:17-18

AUTHOR and DATE

Paul
56 A.D.



2 Corinthians

A DEFENSE OF MINISTRY

great apostle describes his ministry (1-7), encourages the Corinthians to grow in the grace of giving (8-9), and humbly defends his apostolic authority (10-13).

Paul Describes His Ministry

After Paul's gracious salutations, he thanks God for comforting him during his recent afflictions, which were serious enough for him to admit, "indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death" (1:1-11). Paul's difficulties made him rely on God, who raises the dead, which made him grateful.

The apostle quickly tells the Corinthians why his visit to them was delayed. It was not because his desire to see them had changed, as he was not that fickle. Rather, he wanted to give them more time to repent and get their house in order (1:12-2:4). Paul assured them of his trustworthiness by saying, "As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No" (1:18).

The apostle of grace then turns his attention to the subject of forgiveness and restoration after discipline was implemented on a church member, resulting in his repentance (2:5-13). To whom was Paul referring? Most Bible teachers point to the immoral man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5; however, some believe the second Corinthian letter refers to another situation in which a person might have rebelled against Paul's apostolic leadership. In the end, it does not matter which view is correct. What matters is that Paul instructed the church to exercise grace by receiving the man back into the fellowship. It is a beautiful thing to see broken relationships restored when true repentance and the grace of God are at work in the church.

Then, Paul begins a lengthy description of his ministry to the Corinthians, starting with a discussion about how they, and



2 Corinthians

**A DEFENSE
OF MINISTRY**

all believers, are ministers of a new covenant. He compares his ministry to Moses, “who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end” (3:12). Juxtaposed, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (3:14).

Paul also views himself and his ministry team as fragile and easily broken jars of clay. In other words, we, like Paul and his team, are cracked pots through whom the light of the gospel and the glory of God shine (4:1-18). However, “we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” Paul refers to his afflictions as momentary and light compared to “an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison.” Do you have an eternal perspective like Paul’s?

In 5:1-10, Paul continues offering an eternal perspective by comparing our earthly bodies to a temporary tent. While in this tent, “we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,” which he says is “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” He reminds the Corinthians that we “walk by faith, not by sight” and that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,” a reckoning for believers that he introduced in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

Paul continues by emphasizing the ministry of reconciliation (5:11-21), the day of salvation (6:1-13), and the necessity of separateness, holiness, and purity in the Christian life (6:14-7:1). Finally, the apostle expresses his joy after receiving news from Titus that the Corinthians had a change of heart toward him (7:2-16). Authenticity and trustworthiness characterize Paul’s ministry.

Paul Encourages Generosity

In chapters 8-9, Paul invites the Corinthians to participate



2 Corinthians

**A DEFENSE
OF MINISTRY**

generously in a special monetary collection for the poor in Jerusalem. He inspires the Corinthians to participate by mentioning the generous example set forth by the Macedonian churches. Surprised by their gracious response, Paul writes,

For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. 8:3-5

Paul presents the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ as another example to motivate their generosity. “Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (8:8-9). Then, Paul encourages the Corinthians to complete the pledge they made one year earlier (8:10-15). In the largest section of Scripture in the New Testament pertaining to Christian financial stewardship, Paul also details how he entrusted Titus and another brother in Christ to handle the collection and the transportation of the offering to Jerusalem with integrity (8:16-24).

By using an agricultural analogy, Paul encourages the Corinthians to participate in the Jerusalem offering generously when he writes, “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (9:6).¹²

Some point to these chapters when downplaying the necessity of tithing for New Testament believers, the practice of giving ten percent of one’s financial increase to the Lord. Of course, Paul does not mention tithing in his financial stewardship instructions to the Corinthians. Rather, he says, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a



2 Corinthians

**A DEFENSE
OF MINISTRY**

cheerful giver” (9:7). Does Paul’s New Testament instruction negate or replace the Old Testament practice of tithing? Is tithing not for today?

Paul’s encouragement to participate in the Jerusalem offering for the poor actually falls into a different biblical category of giving called a freewill offering. Freewill offerings and tithes are not the same. In the Old Testament, God’s people gave freewill offerings over and above their tithe to support, for example, the building of the temple. King David encouraged people to give to the temple project an amount God placed on their hearts, “freely and wholeheartedly” as they consecrated themselves to the Lord (1 Chronicles 29). Participation in the Jerusalem offering for the poor was a freewill offering, not a tithe.¹³

As New Testament believers, we do not tithe because we are still under the Mosaic law, and the church is not a theocracy, which Israel’s tithes funded. Instead, we tithe because it is the biblical starting point in our giving and the minimum expression of generosity found in the Bible. Rather than 2 Corinthians 8-9 serving as a polemic against tithing, it encourages New Testament believers to soar above the tithe by giving beyond our local churches, with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ inspiring the amount and serving as our motivation.

Paul Defends His Ministry

In chapters 10-13, Paul finally turns his attention to his minority opposition, demonstrating how to appeal to those who resist your ministry leadership. While humbly defending his conduct, character, and calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he begins, “I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am



2 Corinthians

**A DEFENSE
OF MINISTRY**

away!” Then, he immediately states that the weapons of his warfare are “not of the flesh” (10:1-6). Paul knew that he was in a spiritual battle, and the battle belonged to the Lord.

So-called “super-apostles” had beguiled the Corinthians into believing Paul was not trustworthy and that he lacked apostolic credentials. Even though they persuaded a mere minority in the church of this vicious falsehood, a little erroneous leaven leavens the whole lump. Thus, forced by the situation to boast about his credentials (10:7-18), the humble apostle reluctantly defends his superior knowledge (11:1-6), generosity (11:7-11), and integrity (11:12-15). After boasting of his sufferings (11:16-29), Paul writes,

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands. 11:30-33

Finally, in one of the most mysterious passages in the entire New Testament, Paul boasts of the heavenly revelation he received and the thorn that God placed in his flesh to keep him humble (12:1-10). Though the lowly apostle speaks in the third person to conceal the identity of the man who was “caught up to the third heaven,” his willingness to share his personal experience was still like a poker player turning his cards over and revealing a royal flush. After that, the opposition had no choice but to fold and push their cards toward the muck pile.

In chapter 13, Paul brings final warnings to the opposition. Knowing the charges against him were false and flimsy, he challenges them to bring the kind of evidence against him that would stand up in a court of law by saying, “Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses” (13:1). Then, he turns



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A DEFENSE OF MINISTRY

the spotlight on his accusers by saying, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” (13:5). Why does Paul encourage their self-examination? Because they were acting like unbelievers.

Rather than pouring further shame on the Corinthians who opposed him, Paul ends by graciously calling them “brothers” and encouraging them to “rejoice, aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, and live in peace,” while uniting around the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (13:11-14).

OUTLINE	1-7	8-9	10-13
FOCUS	Paul Describes His Ministry	Paul Encourages Generosity	Paul Defends His Ministry
KEY VERSE	4:7	9:6	12:9



Galatians

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

Patrick Henry's words rang forth from St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia, on March 23, 1775, as he closed his speech to the Second Virginia Convention. According to Edmund Randolph, the seventh governor of Virginia, the attendees sat in silence for several minutes after hearing Henry conclude, "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

Those famous words could be written across the pages of Paul's New Testament letter to the Galatians. The situation the apostle addressed was as concerning, if not more, than the campaign for freedom faced by Patrick Henry and his fellow patriots, who stood on the precipice of the American Revolution. The fact that Paul skips over his usual thanksgivings and prayers for the saints points to the grave matter facing the churches of Galatia.

Centuries before a revolutionary patriot named Patrick rang forth about freedom, an apostle named Paul wrote these words to the Galatian churches, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). The "yoke of slavery" Paul had in mind was a distorted gospel preached to the Galatians by the Judaizers, who embraced Paul's



Galatians

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

gospel teaching as long as it required circumcision and strict adherence to the Mosaic law, which it did not (Acts 15:1-5).¹⁴

In his book on Galatians titled *Be Free*, Warren Wiersbe writes,

Galatians is a dangerous book. It exposes the most popular substitute for spiritual living that we have in our churches today—legalism. ... Millions of believers think they are spiritual because of what they don't do—or because of the leader they follow—or because of the group they belong to. The Lord shows us in Galatians how wrong we are—and how right we can be if only we would let the Holy Spirit take over. When the Holy Spirit takes over, there will be liberty, not bondage—cooperation, not competition—glory to God, not praise to man.¹⁵

The church is the custodian of the gracious and free gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and every follower of Jesus bears the responsibility of protecting it. Are you ready to defend the orthodoxy of the Christian faith as Paul did?

No Other Gospel

Paul begins Galatians by challenging those who object to his leadership. He establishes his apostleship as “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (1:1). By 1:6, he is already addressing the four-alarm church fire by saying, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ set us free from the bondage of the law (legalism) to live by the Spirit in liberty.

BIG IDEA

Walk by the Spirit and you will not live by the flesh.

MEMORY VERSE

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

GALATIANS 2:20

AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul
49 or 55 A.D.



Galatians

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.” What does Paul mean by “a different gospel”? He quickly adds,

Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 1:7-8

Paul feels so strongly about the attack on the gospel that he repeats himself in verse 9 — “let him be accursed,” who preaches another gospel!

Every generation must fight for the pure gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Threats confronted the good news when Christianity was still in the cradle. Two thousand years later, sacred hazards still abound in many forms, including Roman Catholicism, Protestant legalism, Mormonism, and the Prosperity Gospel. Each are “different gospels” and represent some form of menacing Galatianism.

Paul continues and gets personal by talking about his own calling and apostleship (1:11-24). He wanted them to know that the gospel he preached was “not man’s gospel” and that he “received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” To solidify the point that divine revelation, not human reason, was the source of his preaching, Paul shares about his “former life in Judaism” and how he “persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it” (1:13).

Paul was a rising rabbi and advancing quickly in Judaism when God revealed His Son to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Afterward, Paul says, “I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.” After three years, Paul traveled to Jerusalem and consulted briefly with Peter (only fifteen days) and James, the Lord’s brother, but not long enough for either of them to influence his teaching.

Fourteen years later, Paul returned to Jerusalem with Barnabas



Galatians

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

and Titus to share another revelation the Lord gave to him about delivering the gospel to the Gentiles. He writes, “When James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised” (2:9).

Paul adds one more personal story to establish his apostolic authority. He reminds his naysayers that he rebuked Peter (Cephas) for his hypocrisy, saying to him, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (2:14). In Acts 10, Peter shed his religious pride and prejudice after meeting a Gentile believer named Cornelius; he also learned that faith in Christ alone meant freedom from the law, something Paul had been preaching for a while.

Paul states his thesis emphatically in 2:15-16,

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Rewind and repeat these words: “By the works of the law no one will be justified.” In other words, doing better, trying harder, or acting more religious will not save you from the penalty of your sin; it does not add to your salvation or sanctification.

Furthermore, Paul explains, “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God” (2:19). Before he shifts to his doctrinal argument, the great apostle hits a personal high note when he writes, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (2:20).



No More Bondage

In chapters 3-4, Paul makes a theological argument for why the Galatians are free from the law as a means of justification, starting with the idea that those who begin in faith must continue in faith (3:1-5). After calling the Galatians “foolish” and “bewitched,” Paul asks three rhetorical questions:

- “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?”
- “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”
- “Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?”

Next, Paul reminds the Galatians that Abraham was justified by faith (3:6-9). “So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” The same principle applies to us today.

In the following verses (3:10-14), Paul argues that Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” The law condemns us and says, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Have you kept the Ten Commandments perfectly? If not, then you are cursed, until you place your faith in Christ, who took your curse upon the cross. Trying harder or doing better will not nullify the curse. What does? Paul echoes the remedy stated first by Habakkuk, the Old Testament prophet, who declared, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Furthermore, the law, which came 430 years after Abraham, does not void the promise God made to him. In other words, the Mosaic law did not change the way God justifies sinners, from



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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

faith to works (3:15-18). Justification was always by faith and made immutable by the promise of God. “Why then the law?” Paul asks. “It was added because of transgressions.” In other words, the law shows us our sin and the necessity of God’s grace through faith (3:19-22).

Think of Paul’s argument this way. Municipal traffic laws do not make you a good driver. They merely reveal the right standard by which the authorities judge your driving. When you exceed the speed limit, for example, the law condemns you. But the law cannot save you from the consequences of speeding. Justifiably, the police officer writes you a ticket and the traffic violation appears on your record. The law performed its duty.

Likewise, the law performed its duty, holding us captive “until the coming faith would be revealed” (3:23-4:7). “So then,” Paul continues, “the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” By faith, we are adopted sons of God and heirs of His promise, no longer slaves to the law or prisoners of it. In summary, Paul says, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (4:4-5).

Finally, Paul expresses his concern for the Galatians who live as slaves to the law (4:8-20) and then makes his final doctrinal argument by drawing upon the story of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31).

Abraham fathered two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, “one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.” Paul speaks allegorically about the two women and their offspring, and then he concludes his doctrinal argument by saying, “So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman” (4:31).



Life in the Spirit

Until now, Paul has argued that the believer in Jesus Christ is free from the law as the means of justification. Those who “accept circumcision” have “fallen away from grace” (5:1-15). However, our liberty in Christ does not set us free to indulge the flesh. Rather, true freedom from religion rejects both legalism and licentious living, and is only possible by “walking in the Spirit” (5:16-26). Paul says pointedly, “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law,” nor will you gratify the desires of the flesh. He contrasts the fruit of the Spirit and the deeds of the flesh.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 5:19-26

Paul continues by offering practical instructions to those who are spiritual: Bear one another’s burdens (6:1-5), share all good things (6:6), do not be deceived (6:7), sow to the Spirit (6:8), do not give up (6:9), and do good to everyone (6:10). He concludes with one more jab at the Judaizers and a warning to the Galatians, “For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh” (6:13). Bondage to the law for thee but not for me was the Judaizers’ attitude.

The loss of freedom is a serious matter in any generation, whether you are Patrick Henry or the Apostle Paul. Nobody should be under a yoke of slavery, especially the kind that comes from religious shackles.



Galatians

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION

How then should we live the Christian life? The answer is the same way we came to Christ, by grace and through faith. Paul says it best in 2:20, and his declaration is worth repeating: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Paul knew the course he should take by faith alone, and he led others to do the same. What course will your Christian life take?

OUTLINE	1-2	3-4	5-6
FOCUS	No Other Gospel	No More Bondage	Freedom in Christ
	Personal	Doctrinal	Practical
KEY VERSE	1:7-8	3:11	5:1



Ephesians

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Imagine a magnificent Mediterranean metropolis and a populous destination known as the Queen City of Asia, located on the west coast of modern Turkey. Picture the cultural heartland of ancient Greece two thousand years ago and a thriving seaport with a robust religious vibe, where people gathered at a pagan temple, known as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Fancy a library where students from a famous school of philosophy studied. Then, visualize a zealous missionary of the Lord Jesus Christ arriving and instructing the inhabitants of the city to stop worshipping manmade gods (Acts 19).

“Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” the rioters shouted when Demetrius, “a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis” (Acts 19:28)¹⁶, told them how the Apostle Paul had disturbed their commercial business in no small way. Paul wanted to address the Ephesians who had gathered in the local theater, which held twenty-five thousand people. However, for his own safety, Paul laid low and departed for Macedonia after the riot quieted down. Later, he delivered his message by letter, which is called “The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians,” and is our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.¹⁷



Ephesians

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Paul made his way to Miletus, where he called for the Ephesian elders to visit him (Acts 20:17-38). After a tearful goodbye, the apostle left for Jerusalem, “constrained by the Spirit,” knowing that he would suffer much. Loyal Jews in the Holy City stirred up the crowd against Paul and had him arrested. Again, for Paul’s safety, and because he appealed to Caesar, they took him to Rome, where he remained under house arrest for two years.

Spiritual Wealth

In 1:3, Paul writes, “Praise be to the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” This verse contains a summary appraisal of our spiritual wealth in Christ by telling us what we inherited (“spiritual blessings”), where it is located (“in the heavenly realms”), who gave it (“the Father”), and why it was given to us (“praise be to God”). In so many words, Paul wrote this epistle to tell the Ephesians believers and us, “You are worth a fortune in Christ!” However, the Ephesians were ignorant of their wealth and lived like spiritual paupers.

The Ephesians, like many Christians today, remind me of people on the popular reality television program called *Antiques Roadshow*, where world-class experts appraise family heirlooms, flea market finds, antiques, and other collectibles. Is it trash or treasure? The look of surprise on some people’s faces is priceless when they discover they own a real treasure, the kind that might make their retirement years more golden.

JESUS JUNCTURE

Believers are worth a fortune in Christ.

BIG IDEA

Walk worthy of your calling in Christ, who is building His church.

MEMORY VERSE

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul
61 A.D.



Ephesians

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Followers of Jesus should not be surprised to learn we are spiritually rich. Being “in Christ”—a phrase Paul uses many times in Ephesians—is the key to unlocking the value of our heavenly inheritance. “In Christ” means more than just being saved from sin’s penalty; it suggests living in personal and vital union with Jesus, as a branch is to a vine (John 15:1-17), as a man and woman are in marriage (Eph. 5:22-23; Gen. 2:24), as a head connects to other members of a body in a single organism (1 Cor. 12:12-27). All the spiritual wealth we possess is because we are in Christ. The fact that our blessings also exist in the “heavenly realms” reminds us that the most valuable things in life are unseen.¹⁸

In the Greek language, 1:3-14 is a continuous, unbroken sentence. Paul gets so excited about our spiritual blessings in Christ that he barely takes a breath. He groups his thoughts into a Trinitarian flow, which we could express this way: The wealth of the Father is yours (1:3-6), the riches of the Son are yours (1:7-12), and the blessings of the Spirit are yours (1:13-14). In Christ, believers are chosen, holy, blameless, predestined, adopted, beloved, redeemed, and forgiven. But the good news does not end there. God’s children also possess a divine inheritance, and the Holy Spirit guarantees our salvation with His seal.

By Grace Through Faith

Paul begins chapter 2 by diagnosing our human condition.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 2:1-3



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Before Christ made us alive in Him by faith, we were spiritually dead, decaying rapidly, and living like spiritual zombies—the walking dead! As Wiersbe says, “This means that our world is one vast graveyard, filled with people who are dead while alive.” Furthermore, we were on the wrong course, under the wrong control, engaged in wrong conduct, and “children of wrath.” Is there any hope for humankind? The words “but God” transition Paul’s thoughts.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 2:4-7

Through His Son Jesus Christ, God makes all the difference. He made us alive, set us free, and exalted us to a high position. Why did He do this wonderful thing? Because He loves us and is rich in mercy. Consider this: God has more mercy than all the millionaires and billionaires in the world have money.

Paul summarizes the gospel in 2:8-10. Salvation happens by God’s grace and through faith, “not a result of works” but “for good works.” Then, Paul describes how the gospel reconciles broken relationships (2:11-13), breaks down walls of hostility (2:14-18), and builds the household of God (2:19-22).

The Mystery of Christ and His Church

If you love a good mystery, you will love chapter 3 of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, where the apostle introduces the mystery of Christ and His church. Paul says this mystery was “made known to me by revelation” (3:4). In the Bible, a mystery is something God once concealed but is now revealed. In 3:6, Paul defines what he



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describes as the “mystery of Christ,” by saying, “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

Paul considered it a sacred trust or “stewardship” to minister the gospel to the Gentiles, “according to the gift of God’s grace” (3:7). He preached “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8) to the Gentiles “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10). In other words, the church of Jesus Christ is the custodian of God’s wisdom and is on full display before angels and demons. Think about it. Angels and demons are watching us do church, and they are either rejoicing or laughing at us.

Paul devotes the rest of chapter 3 to his second prayer for the Ephesians (3:14-21; see also 1:15-23). If you want to know how to pray for others, study Paul’s prayers for the churches he planted, which are not “now I lay me down to sleep” prayers. Rather, Paul prayed for the Ephesians, for example, “that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being” (3:16) and “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:19). Paul’s benediction in 3:20-21 is about as optimistic and uplifting as a prayer gets.

Life Together

In chapter 4, Paul transitions from doctrine to duty, from our position in Christ to our practice as believers in the body of Christ. The power of biblical community bursts forth. Eloquently, Paul writes, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (4:4-6).

God’s people are always better together than apart. That is why the church is still the best incubator for spiritual formation.



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With others in the body of Christ, we discover our purpose, fulfill our calling, use our spiritual gifts, and mature in our faith. There is nothing more powerful on planet earth than the unified church of Jesus Christ doing life and ministry together.

Paul gets practical by urging the Ephesians and us to “speak the truth in love (4:15), “no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds” (4:17-20), and to “put on the new self” (4:21-24). After a short course on honesty (4:25), anger management (4:26-27), and the importance of “doing honest work” (4:28), he says not to grieve the Holy Spirit (4:30). Paul ends the chapter with soothing words that make life together in Christ enjoyable. “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (4:32).

Walk in Love and Light

The word “walk” appears seven times in the short letter Paul wrote to the Ephesians, each time suggesting that following Jesus is more than a Sunday stroll in the park. Make no mistake about it. The Christian life is a vigorous, purposeful, ambulatory movement toward a gospel and Jesus-centered life.

In Ephesians, unbelievers walk in step with the world, the devil, and the sinful passions of the flesh (2:1-3). Believers should walk in good works (2:10), worthy of our calling (4:1), and not like those who do not know God (4:17). In chapter 5, Paul instructs the Ephesians and us to walk in love (5:2) and walk as children of light (5:9). Finally, he says, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (5:15-16). On the heels of Paul’s instruction about walking wisely, he urges, “Be filled with the Spirit” (5:19).¹⁹

In 5:22-33, Paul instructs husbands and wives in the profound “mystery” called marriage, which “refers to Christ and the church.” That means your marriage is not primarily about you and your



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happiness; it is a gospel picture, which elevates the importance of your marriage thriving and the necessity of you and your spouse following God's plan for marriage. Paul establishes the husband as "the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior." He summarizes God's plan for a dream marriage by saying, "However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Our new life in Christ transforms more than the marriage relationship. In chapter 6, Paul continues by instructing the relationships between parents and children (6:1-4) and slaves and masters (6:5-9).

Spiritual Warfare

Then, Paul turns his attention to the spiritual battles we face daily in the heavenly realms (6:10-20). Like bookends, Ephesians starts with spiritual wealth and ends with spiritual warfare.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 6:10-12

The battle in the invisible realm is real. The powers of darkness are fierce. But the weapons of our warfare are stronger. Therefore, believers must put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and gospel shoes. We must pick up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. We must also engage in warfare prayer. Are you dressed for spiritual battle? Are you winning the daily struggles you face against the world, the flesh, and the devil?

I wonder. If Paul had made his way to the theater in Ephesus and delivered this message to the rioters, would they have changed



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their shouts from “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” to “Great is Jesus, who is the Christ!”? I also wonder who you are shouting for today.

OUTLINE	1	2	3	4	5	6
FOCUS	Spiritual Wealth	By Grace Through Faith	The Mystery of the Church	Life Together	Walk in Love and Light	Spiritual Warfare
	Doctrine			Duties		
KEY VERSE	1:14	2:8-9	3:20-21	4:4-6	5:2	6:12



Philippians

CHOOSE JOY

It was a beautiful day in the Hundred-Acre Wood. As Pooh and Piglet approached a bridge to play their favorite game called Poohsticks, they saw someone's tail sticking out from under the overpass. It looked like Tigger's tail, and sure enough, it was. Why was Tigger hiding under the bridge?

"Eeyore said that nice weather like this is earthquake weather!" Tigger said. "He said the Hundred-Acre Wood might have an earthquake today. I'm staying here until it's over!"

Eeyore's earthquake forecast bothered the three friends deeply. Eventually, Pooh, Piglet, and Tigger ran into their friend, Christopher Robin, who straightened out the whole misunderstanding.

"There's no such thing as earthquake weather," said Christopher Robin. "Eeyore is just being gloomy again." Relieved by Christopher Robin's soothing words, the three friends went looking for Eeyore. In *Be Happy, Eeyore*, A.A. Milne writes,

Pooh led the way to the gloomy place where Eeyore lived. There they found him nibbling some thistles. "You said there was going to be an earthquake, Eeyore!" Tigger said. "You've



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spoiled our whole day!” “Why are you always so gloomy about things?” asked Piglet. “It’s nicer to be happy than gloomy,” said Pooh. “Perhaps it is,” Eeyore agreed. “But I don’t know how to be happy. Nobody ever showed me.”

Like Eeyore, do you feel gloomy today? Is everything around you a dark cloud? Is joy far removed from your experience? Our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible—Paul’s letter to the Philippians—will show you how to choose joy and embrace a positive outlook on life.

Joy is a choice! I know because Philippians is one of four epistles Paul wrote from prison, which is a dark, gloomy place. And yet, the word “rejoice,” or some form of it, appears seven times in Philippians, a New Testament letter with only four chapters that overflows with positivity and a glass-half-full outlook. That is only possible because Paul, while in prison, chose joy. In 4:4, he writes, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say rejoice.”

Even James, Jesus’s half-brother, writes to people in dire straits and says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness” (James 1:2-3). The joy of the Lord is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and your strength (Nehemiah 8:10). With the Holy Spirit’s supernatural help, you really can choose joy, no matter the circumstances you face in life.

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus descended into greatness through humility.

BIG IDEA

Choose joy in all circumstances.

MEMORY VERSE

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

PHILIPPIANS 1:21

AUTHOR and DATE

Paul
62 A.D.



Philippians

CHOOSE JOY

The Church at Philippi

The Apostle Paul founded the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey. Beyond the letter, Acts 16 records most of what we know about the church, including three significant events associated with its founding. They include the conversion of a prominent businesswoman named Lydia, the exorcism of a demon-possessed girl, and the dramatic release of Paul and Silas from prison after an earthquake shook the jail doors open at midnight.

During Paul's imprisonment, the Philippian believers sent Epaphroditus to Rome to encourage Paul. In turn, Paul sent Timothy, his ministry protégé, to Philippi to encourage them (2:19-30). The church was most likely a small congregation with meager means, making their financial gift to Paul's ministry even more worthy of his gratitude.

Generally, the imprisoned apostle wrote this letter to thank the Philippians for their generous gift to his ministry (4:10-20), to expose his enemies who opposed the gospel he preached (1:15-17; 1:27-28; 3:2; 3:18-19), and to quiet a rift between two women in the church (4:2-3).

To Live Is Christ

Joy and gratitude are never far apart, which is why Paul begins his letter by thanking God for the Philippians. Quickly, he offers an encouraging word: "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (1:6). Paul's positive outlook on their future life in Christ fills their hearts with courage.

Paul did not let his chains defeat him (1:12-14), critics dissuade him (1:15-18), or crisis discourage him (1:19-26). Referring to his imprisonment, he writes, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has



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happened to me has really served to advance the gospel” (1:12). The fact that his negative circumstances positively impacted the gospel brought the apostle comfort and joy. Though in prison and with his life draped in uncertainty, Paul expressed his confidence that “Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (1:20-21).

To die is gain? Joy is not only a choice, but it yields a positive outlook on this life and beyond. Attitude is everything, and it made a huge difference in the way Paul navigated his difficult circumstances. Attitude really does determine one’s altitude. About attitude, Charles Swindoll writes,

“The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It’s more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, gifted ability, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past, we cannot change that certain people will act in a certain way. The only thing we can do is play the one string that we have, and that string is attitude. I am convinced that life is ten percent what happens to me and ninety percent how I react to it. And so, it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes.”

Descending into Greatness

Nothing filled Paul’s heart with joy more than the unifying aspects of the gospel. He begins chapter 2 with these words,



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So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 2:1-4

High and lofty are Paul's aspirations for the Philippians and us. How do we live up to the apostle's soaring rhetoric? Paul immediately sets forth the example and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Let's read on.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 2:5-11

Paul describes how Jesus Christ descended into greatness through humility. The Greek word *kenosis* ("emptied") refers to the way Jesus laid aside the full privileges of His deity. The Savior did not cease to be God in any way, nor did He empty Himself of His divine attributes (Colossians 2:9). But He did not always draw upon the fullness of His divine power. Sometimes He chose to operate within the limits of His humanity. For example, He grew tired and thirsty. He chose to be born "in the likeness of men" and became "obedient to the point of death."

Also, Jesus did not present Himself as one would expect of deity. He served others instead of expecting others to serve Him. For these reasons and more, God the Father highly exalted His Son, giving



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CHOOSE JOY

Him “the name that is above every name”—a name to which “every knee should bow.”

Paul continues by encouraging the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” and “do all things without grumbling and disputing” (2:12-16). Then, he invites them to rejoice with him, even if he is “poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith” (2:17).

The Upward Call of God

As he begins chapter 3, Paul continues to express his joy and encourages the Philippians to do the same. “Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you” (3:1). Then, he warns the Philippians about joy-stealers who might lead them astray (3:1-3). He instructs them to conduct a thorough audit of their lives (4-6), ledger their worldly gains into the loss column (3:7), and cling to eternal values (3:8-11).

Paul counted as loss everything that he gained before he met Christ. He expressed his deep desire to “know him and the power of his resurrection” and that he “may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (3:10). Do you want to know Christ enough to share in His pain, despise, rejection, and death? A deeper fellowship with Jesus awaits those who do. Then, the humble apostle encourages the Philippians and us to reach for the “upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 3:12-14



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CHOOSE JOY

Too many of us live below our exalted position in Christ. We reach for things in life that are temporal, not eternal, earthly, not heavenly, downward, not upward. We set goals, even achieve them, that are not worthy of the exalted Christ.

Instead, we must live the upward life in response to the call of God and His claim upon our lives as believers in Jesus Christ. Such a life has direction (upward), and nearly always changes our trajectory. How do we live that way?

The Apostle Paul remained teachable (“not that I have already obtained this”), disciplined (“I press on”), focused (“this one thing I do”), and goal-oriented (“I press on toward the goal”). He also adopted a winner’s mindset by doing everything “to win the prize.” Choose to live this way and you too will experience joy, even in adverse circumstances.

Positively Content

In the final chapter of the letter, the word “rejoice” appears three times (4:4, 10). Joy exudes Paul’s thinking as he notes “the Lord is at hand” (4:5). Therefore, “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (4:6). Joyful people are not anxious; they also discipline their minds.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 4:8

What is your mind dwelling on today? The old saying is true: Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.



Philippians

CHOOSE JOY

After expressing his gratitude for their generous gift to his ministry, Paul launches into a short course on contentment. Joyful people also learn contentment.

For I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. 4:11-13

Contentment does not come to us naturally; we must learn it. Paul writes, “I have learned” twice. In the same way that I learned high school chemistry, through a lecture and a lab, we must learn contentment through a sermon and the laboratory of life, where we experience times of prosperity and seasons of financial adversity. In both circumstances, we learn that the power of Christ is sufficient and that “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (4:19).

The Apostle Paul was nothing like negative, gloomy Eeyore. At times, he might have felt like he was eating thistles, but the sky was always blue for Paul because he chose joy and kept his eye on the eternal prize that awaits those who serve Christ faithfully.

OUTLINE	1	2	3	4
FOCUS	To Live is Christ	Descending Into Greatness	The Upward Call of God	Positively Content
KEY VERSE	1:21	2:5-7	3:14	4:11



Colossians

JESUS IS GREATER THAN

Today, we hear a lot about “fake news,” but what exactly is it? Of course, that depends on who you ask. Penn State University defines fake news as “sources that intentionally fabricate information, disseminate deceptive content, or grossly distort actual news reports, usually to advance a specific political perspective.”²⁰ That definition is as good as any. In the end, fake news erodes journalistic integrity and undermines the important role that truth plays in a free society.

However, a false Christ is more damaging than fake news. A false Christ can lead people away from the truth faster than a CNN news cycle, for a longer period of time, and with eternal consequences. Regarding the last days, Jesus warned, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray” (Matthew 24:4-5).

Prophetically, the “last days” began two thousand years ago. Thus, it should not surprise us that false Christs and attacks upon the real Jesus crept into the early church, which is why the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Colossae. Paul had never visited the church that Epaphras founded in the Lycus Valley. But when he heard that a heresy about the nature of Christ threatened the



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mostly Gentile congregation, the imprisoned apostle responded with some of the most soaring Christology found anywhere in the New Testament, on the same scale as John's treatise about the Logos (John 1:1-14).

For example, Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as the "image of the invisible God" (1:15), the creator and sustainer of all things (1:16-17), the head of His body, the church (1:18), the fullness of God in bodily form (1:19), and the One who reconciles all things to Himself in heaven and on earth (1:20). Paul is just getting warmed up in chapter 1! After a study of Colossians, William Barclay said, "It is not until the church is confronted with some dangerous heresy that she begins to realize the riches of orthodoxy."²¹

In Colossians, Paul travels deep into the substance of the Christian faith to demonstrate that Jesus is greater than what the false teachers were presenting, and then applies the reality of Christ to everyday life in the home, work, and relationships. This stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible presents us with some of the most vivid pictures of Jesus, who is the Christ.

Ascendency of Christ

Paul begins with thanksgiving and prayer for the Colossians (1:1-14). He thanks God for the fruit of the gospel in them—faith, hope, and love. Then, he prays for them in a manner that models how Christians should pray for each other. For example, "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus as the "fullness of deity" in bodily form and the "image of the invisible God."

BIG IDEA

Jesus is greater than what the false teachers say about Him.

MEMORY VERSE

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

COLOSSIANS 2:9

AUTHOR and DATE

Paul
61 A.D.



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and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:9-10). Paul also reminds the Colossians that God delivered them “from the domain of darkness” and placed them into the “kingdom of his beloved Son” (1:13).

Colossians 1:15-23 contains some of the loftiest language about Jesus Christ found anywhere in the Bible. Paul puts to rest any notion that Jesus was less than who He claimed to be. Counteracting the less-than heresy ripping through the Colossian church, Jesus is supreme, greater than anything we can imagine Him to be. He is greater than the “great teacher” and “good moral leader” that so many people today say He was. He is certainly greater than what the false teachers in Colossae said of Him.

Two thousand years ago, the Gnostics taught that Jesus was a derivation of God, but not actually Him. Like the rays of the sun, the Gnostic Jesus emanated from the supreme God. But just as a ray of sunshine was not the sun, so Gnostic Jesus was not actually God.

The Gnostic Jesus has a lot in common with today’s New Age Christ, who is nothing more than a guru that achieved a higher spirituality than others like him. Discovering the god or Christ in you is the aim of New Age spirituality, which borrows the terminology of orthodox Christianity and then redefines it. With fewer words than Abraham Lincoln spoke in his Gettysburg Address, Paul crushes the fake news nonsense about Jesus put forth by the old and new Gnostics.

Once Paul establishes who Jesus is, he pivots to who we are in Christ. In summary, we were “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds” (1:21). However, we are now in Christ—“reconciled,” “holy and blameless,” and “above reproach” (1:23).

This sets up Paul’s discussion about the mystery of Christ in you (1:24-29), which he applies to the way we suffer and serve. This divine mystery is about the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit and



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the fulfillment of God's promise to restore all things. It also includes the future resurrection, our eternal inheritance, and the wisdom of Christ. "He is the one we proclaim," Paul says, "so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ" (1:29). Rhetorically, Paul takes the Colossians and us to a high and lofty place.

Alive in Christ

In chapter 2, Paul warms up the letter relationally by telling the Colossians, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face." He encourages them to be "knit together in love." Then, he applies the mystery of Christ to their daily walk with Jesus by saying, "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (2:1-7).

After warm greetings and encouragement, Paul returns to his concern about what threatens the church. "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (2:8). Paul's warning should make us think of what philosophies and human traditions threaten the orthodoxy of the Christian faith today: Secular humanism, moral relativism, Darwinian evolution, sexual and gender revolution, even socialism and communism.

The deep roots of our faith protect us against the kidnapping of our thoughts. Those deep roots include five realities, expressed eloquently by Paul. In summary, he says believers are complete in Christ (2:9-10), sanctified in Christ (2:11), alive in Christ (2:12-13), acquitted in Christ (2:13-14), and victorious in Christ (2:15).

In 2:16-23, Paul argues that the real substance of our faith grows



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JESUS IS GREATER THAN

in a community that offers real conversations about real faith. Also, the real substance of our faith is not found in rules or rituals but in a real relationship with Jesus Christ, which is something that legalism, mysticism, and asceticism cannot produce.

New Identity in Christ

In chapter 3, Paul transitions to the practical implications of the Jesus-is-greater-than proposition. Because the devil is an identity thief, believers in Jesus must understand, embrace, and live out our identity in Christ. In 3:1-4, Paul uses words like “died,” “raised,” “seated,” “hidden,” and “glorified” to describe our position in Christ.

Living out our identity in Christ starts by setting our minds “on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,” and by dressing for spiritual success. In 3:5-17, Paul instructs the Colossians and us to put off the old self and put on the new self. He starts negatively by saying, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” and points to the vices of the flesh, starting with “sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” A believer cannot thrive in Christ apart from the daily mortification of the flesh.

Then, Paul pivots to a list of social sins, including anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth, and lying. These, too, must be put to death. Wiersbe says, “These sins belong to the old life and have no place in our new life in Christ.”²² After believers put off the vices of the flesh negatively, we must positively put on the virtues of the Spirit.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which



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binds everything together in perfect harmony. 3:12-14

Now, Paul uses words that speak of our identity in Christ, like “chosen,” “holy,” “loved,” and “forgiven.” Putting on the virtues of the Spirit yields peace in our hearts and gratitude (3:15). The apostle tells us to renew our minds with the word of God (3:16) and encourages us to get connected in biblical community, the place where “there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (3:12).

In other words, the united church of Christ is the best incubator of spiritual transformation for followers in Jesus. We cannot live out who we are in Christ apart from a deep connection to a local church.

Christ, who is our life, also impacts three spheres of human relationships: Husbands and wives (3:18-19), parents and children (3:20-21), and employers and employees (3:22-4:1). It is “fitting in the Lord” for wives to respect their husbands and for husbands to show their wives love and kindness. Because the home is the first place where children learn to respect divine authority, Paul instructs children to obey their parents and fathers not to sow seeds of anger in their kids. Considering who Jesus Christ is, the apostle writes to bondservants, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

Christ in Everyday Life

As much as Paul takes the Colossians and us to the highest place of understanding about the person and nature of Jesus Christ, he never loses sight of the practical expressions of faith in everyday life. As he closes his letter to the Colossians, the apostle makes it clear that Christians should remain personally alert in prayer; prayer must also



Colossians

JESUS IS GREATER THAN

bathe and empower the proclamation of the gospel.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. 4:2-4

Paul continues by encouraging the Colossians and us to live wisely in word and deed (4:5-6). Wiersbe concurs by saying, “The Christian’s walk and talk must be in harmony with each other.”

Finally, Paul lands the plane with some of the most personal and hospitable words found anywhere in his epistles (4:5-18). He mentions the names of eleven people with whom he had a personal and ministry relationship: Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Barnabas, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha, and Archippus. Each has a story to tell that relates to the Jesus-is-greater-than proposition, which Paul presents throughout the letter.

For example, Jesus is greater than ethnic tensions, evidenced by both Jews and Gentiles in the list of Paul’s close companions. Jesus is greater than the failures of your past. If you have doubts about that, ask Onesimus, the runaway slave, and Mark, who abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the mission field. Jesus is greater than the pleasures of this world, which is something Demas, “having loved this present world,” learned the hard way after forsaking Paul and their ministry partnership (2 Timothy 4:10 KJV). And Paul’s personal testimony reminds us that Jesus is greater than the sufferings we experience as followers of Jesus.

There was nothing fake about the good news of Jesus Christ that Paul proclaimed. When others attacked his Savior and Friend in a way that threatened the viability of His church, Paul responded rhetorically, theologically, practically. A clear view of Jesus Christ is always the right response to heresy about Him. And if anybody in



Colossians

JESUS IS GREATER THAN

Colossae ever doubted Paul’s apostolic authority, not to mention his ministry authenticity, he said conclusively, “Remember my chains” (4:19).

Remembering Paul’s chains is exactly what the Basilica of Saint Paul does in Rome, where the great apostle is buried. Above his gravesite in the massive house of worship sits a small box that displays the chain that held Paul captive in prison, a fitting reminder that nothing can imprison the gospel of Jesus Christ.

OUTLINE	1	2	3	4
FOCUS	Ascendency of Christ	Alive in Christ	Identity in Christ	Christ in Everyday Life
	Doctrine		Practice	
KEY VERSE	1:15	2:9	3:1	4:5



1 Thessalonians

THE LORD'S COMING

Less than twenty years after Jesus's earthly life and ministry, a zealous gospel missionary arrived in Thessalonica, a prominent seaport and capital of the Roman province in Macedonia. For three consecutive Sabbaths, the Apostle Paul "reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ'" (Acts 17:3). Many people responded positively to the gospel, including some of the city's leading women, devout Greeks, and Jews.

Not surprisingly, the Jewish leaders grew jealous and recruited some rabble-rousers to form a mob, "set the city in an uproar," and coerce a gospel sympathizer named Jason out of his house, hoping to draw out Paul and Silas with him. When that did not work, the Bible says, "They dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus'" (Acts 17:6-7).



1 Thessalonians

**THE LORD'S
COMING**

By proclaiming King Jesus, Paul and his missionary church planting team became known as men who “turned the world upside down,” a badge of honor for any Christian. Is your faith turning the world upside down? Do people close to you know that you serve the King of kings and Lord of lords?

Paul and Silas departed Thessalonica at night and traveled to Berea, where they went into the Jewish synagogue and found Jews who were “more noble than the Thessalonians” because “they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Later, Paul grows concerned about the progress of the Thessalonians’ faith. He remains in Athens but sends Timothy to encourage them and find out how they are doing (3:1-5). Timothy returns with a positive report about how the Thessalonians were growing in faith and love (3:6-10). However, they were grieving the loss of friends and loved ones who had died. Erroneous views they developed about the return of Jesus Christ complicated their grief. Paul responded with two letters to the Thessalonians, each with a strong emphasis on the Lord’s coming, which Paul had taught them about previously.

Together, First and Second Thessalonians contain nearly two dozen references to the Lord’s coming, also known as “the blessed hope” of the church (Titus 2:19). For example, Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians contains five chapters, each one closing with a reference to the Lord’s coming, like “wait for his Son from heaven (1:10)” and “for what is our hope or joy or crown of

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus is the believer’s hope in salvation and sanctification, and a blessing at His coming.

BIG IDEA

Encourage one another with the Lord’s coming.

MEMORY VERSE

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 THESSALONIANS
4:16

AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul
51 A.D.



1 Thessalonians

**THE LORD'S
COMING**

boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming?” (2:19).

Furthermore, chapter 3 ends with a doxology where God establishes our hearts “blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” 3:13). Chapter 4 closes with the most significant passage of Scripture related to the Rapture of the Church (4:13-17), phase one of Jesus’s Second Coming. Chapter 5 begins with a description of the Day of the Lord and ends with another doxology about how the Lord will keep us blameless “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23).

Paul’s Ministry to the Thessalonians

In chapters 1-3, Paul expresses his heartfelt love and appreciation for the Thessalonians, starting with these encouraging words, “We give thanks to God always for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2-3). Faith, love, and hope characterized the Thessalonians.

Paul goes on to affirm the example the Thessalonians set before all the churches in Macedonia and in Achaia. They became known as the church that “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:9). This is a description of true and genuine repentance. What kind of reputation does your church have in the community, and how are you contributing to it?

In prayer, Paul also thanked God for the way the Thessalonians received his teaching. In 2:13, he writes, “When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.”

Churches like this are in short supply today. I encourage you to find one that loves and preaches God’s word. Find one that affirms



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COMING**

the inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of Holy Scripture—every jot and tittle of it. Better still, find a church that loves the Bible's Author as much as it loves people. Then, do not hesitate to invest your time, talent, and treasure there.

Paul also defends his ministry to the Thessalonians, having brought the word of God to them boldly. Even though he suffered conflict and was treated shamefully at Philippi (2:2), Paul did not back down in the face of difficulty; he did not retreat from taking the gospel to the ends of the earth when things got tough. The passage below provides an example of Paul's integrity and pastoral heart.

For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 2:3-8

Paul completes his personal reflection and expressions of fond affection about the Thessalonians with one of two doxologies in the letter, pointing them again to the Lord's coming.

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 3:11-13



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Paul's Message to the Thessalonians

In chapters 4-5, Paul expands on subjects he had previously taught the Thessalonians, starting with sexual and social ethics (4:1-8). He says, for example, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.”

Having grown up in a Greco-Roman culture with loose sexual and social ethics, the gentile believers in the Thessalonian church lacked the moral training found in the Mosaic Law. Thus, the moral responsibilities in Christianity were new to them; they needed Paul's reminder, as Christians do today.

As America grows increasingly secular and post-Christian, believers in Jesus need to know how to walk with God, please Him, and “control [their] own body in holiness and honor.” The church must proclaim the whole counsel of God, even regarding sexual and social ethics. Paul makes it clear that abstaining from sexual immorality is “the will of God.” That means engaging in sexual behavior that the Bible deems immoral is equal to walking outside of the perfect will of God for your life.

Furthermore, Paul says abstaining from sexual immorality is “your sanctification,” meaning that which sets believers apart from the unbelieving world. The biblical standard of sexual and social ethics will always be at odds with the world and may mean you must stand alone in your school, workplace, or family. Indeed, if you stand up for sexual purity and find yourself standing alone, remember this: “For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you” (4:7-8).

In 4:13-18, Paul skillfully turns his attention to the Lord's coming



1 Thessalonians

**THE LORD'S
COMING**

for the purpose of encouraging the distressed Thessalonians who grieved over their dead loved ones. “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”

The apostle encourages the Thessalonians and us by revealing an event in Bible prophecy known as the Rapture of the Church.²³

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 4:16-17

Though the word “rapture” does not appear in the Bible, the phrase in the Greek language translated “caught up” captures the idea and differentiates the event from what is commonly called Jesus’s Second Coming. The Rapture was not taught in the Old Testament because it was a “mystery” (1 Corinthians 15:50-57).

Bible prophecy is always meant to encourage us, not divide us (4:18). However, good people in the body of Christ differ in their understanding of this passage as it relates to the Lord’s coming. I believe the evidence is compelling that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is a two-stage event, separated by the outpouring of God’s wrath on planet earth for seven years.²⁴ First, Jesus comes *for* His bride, the church; seven years later, after the Tribulation, He comes *with* His bride to fight the Battle of Armageddon and win.

One argument among many for the Rapture of the Church is that believers are exempt from God’s wrath. Paul mentions this twice in First Thessalonians, saying Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:10) and “God has not destined us for wrath” (5:9; also Revelation 3:10).²⁵ The everyday tribulation Jesus said we would experience in this life is not God’s wrath (John 16:33). Rather, God’s wrath is



1 Thessalonians

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COMING**

specifically for unbelievers; it certainly includes eternal damnation in a place called hell, but it is more than that.

The seven-year Tribulation described in Revelation 6-19—where a reference to God’s wrath appears eleven times—is a specific and future time on earth when God will pour out His wrath upon the Gentiles nations through a series of seal, trumpet, bowl judgments. There is no mention of the church after Revelation 5, suggesting the bride of Christ is already gone from this earth and worshipping in heaven when God’s wrath begins. During this time, also known as Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), God gives Israel a last chance to receive her Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prophets of old spoke of the outpouring of God’s wrath as the Day of the Lord, which had both present and future implications. In 5:1-11, Paul transitions his thoughts to the Day of the Lord as a future event in Bible prophecy that immediately follows the Rapture of the Church. According to Mark Hitchcock, a pastor and Bible prophecy expert, the way Paul shifts his topic is significant because it represents “a clear order of events.”²⁶

Paul concludes his discussion about the Day of the Lord in the same way he did the Rapture of the Church (4:18), with a reminder that Bible prophecy is a source of encouragement (5:11). The Lord’s coming should also motivate us to “rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (5:16-22).

Paul ends his overall letter with a stirring benediction that points to the Lord’s coming for the last time, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (5:23-24).



1 Thessalonians

**THE LORD'S
COMING**

When Jesus Christ returns, He will turn the world upside down again. Until then, it is our job to get prepared for the Lord's coming, and to proclaim it to the world around us.

OUTLINE	1-3	4-5
FOCUS	Paul's Ministry to the Thessalonians <i>"You had become very dear to us"</i>	Paul's Message to the Thessalonians <i>"The dead in Christ shall rise first"</i>
KEY VERSE	2:9	4:16



2 Thessalonians

UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS

L.S. Lowry painted 'A Doctor's Waiting Room' in 1920. Until late in his life and career, the English artist brushed colorful 'matchstick men' in busy industrialized settings, often returning to people waiting for medical attention.²⁷

For me, waiting is never an easy thing to do, especially waiting in a doctor's office. The fact that the doctor calls it the waiting room bugs me. I don't want to wait for a doctor to get around to seeing me. I made an appointment at a specific time, and I want my doctor to see me at that time and not be late. Whew. Thanks for letting me vent. Can you tell that Lowry's painting triggers me? In fairness, I know that medical doctors deal with emergencies every day, making it nearly impossible for them to control their time. But sitting in anyone's waiting room still distresses me.

For some, waiting for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is not any easier than waiting in the doctor's waiting room. The New Testament mentions the Second Coming of Jesus Christ three hundred and eighteen times. Yet, the church has been waiting two thousand years for the promised return of Jesus Christ. Some in the



2 Thessalonians

**UNTIL CHRIST
RETURNS**

early church grew weary of waiting for the Lord's coming, prompting Peter to write, "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8-10). Paul wrote two letters to the Thessalonians about the Lord's coming.

Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians arrived shortly after his first, probably within a month and while he remained at Corinth. The sufferings and persecutions the Thessalonians endured for the cause of Christ complicated the distress they already felt in their hearts about those who had died in Christ. Adding to their anxiety, someone had apparently misrepresented Paul's teaching about the Lord's coming, suggesting that the Day of the Lord had already happened. Paul writes again to encourage the Thessalonians and clarify their understanding about the Lord's coming. In summary, Paul instructs the Thessalonians and us to walk worthy, stand firm, wait expectantly, and work hard until Christ comes.

Walk Worthy

In chapter 1, the Lord's coming is the reason believers should walk "worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering" (1:5). In 1:4-7, he consoles the Thessalonians in their present situation by saying, "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well" (NIV). Then, with the future and eschatological Day of the Lord in mind, Paul turns his attention to the justice God will deliver at the end of the age.

JESUS JUNCTURE

At His coming, Jesus is joy and hope for believers, and a flaming fire of judgment for those "who do not know God" (1:8).

BIG IDEA

Until Christ comes, walk worthy, stand firm, and wait patiently.

MEMORY VERSE

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

2 THESSALONIANS
2:15

AUTHOR and DATE

Paul
51 A.D.



2 Thessalonians

**UNTIL CHRIST
RETURNS**

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. 1:8-10 NIV

Paul assured the Thessalonians they would escape the Lord's punishment on the Day of the Lord by saying, "This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you" (1:10). I must ask, does this include *you*? Have you obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by placing your faith in Him alone? I cannot overstate the urgency of my question and your reply. Paul concludes chapter 1 with prayer for the Thessalonians.

To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 1:11-12

Stand Firm

In chapter 2, Paul turns his full attention to correcting the spurious teaching they received from false teachers about the Lord's coming. Given the tribulations they were experiencing, the Thessalonians feared they had missed the Rapture of the Church and the Day of the Lord had already arrived. Paul comforted them with this reminder.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son



2 Thessalonians

**UNTIL CHRIST
RETURNS**

of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 2:1-4

Paul states why the Day of the Lord, which is something he discussed in First Thessalonians 5:1-11, has not already happened. Aside from the Rapture of the Church that precedes the Day of the Lord, two more things must happen before that awesome day arrives. First, “the rebellion” must take place. The Greek word translated “rebellion” in 2:3 is *apostasia*, from which the English word “apostasy” comes, as rendered in the New American Standard (NAS) translation of the Bible. The King James (KJV) translation calls it “the falling away.”

Apostasy is the abandonment of truth and the wholesale rejection of God’s four-fold revelation in creation, conscience, the written word of God, and the living *Logos*, who is Jesus Christ. Thus, a further and final falling away from the truth will happen to inaugurate the ultimate Day of the Lord. While it might have seemed to the Thessalonians that the world had already fallen away, nothing like what will happen at the end of the age had happened. The same is true for us in our time, although we are two thousand years closer to the Lord’s return than were the Thessalonians, and the rejection of truth appears to be accelerating.

Second, the “man of lawlessness,” whom Paul also calls him the “the son of destruction,” is revealed before the Day of the Lord. Who is the man of lawlessness? Interpretations throughout church history vary. Some say Paul is speaking figuratively about the Roman Empire or Judaism. Others point fancifully to the Caesars and Popes.²⁸

However, let’s not tinker with the plain meaning of words. Paul is not talking about a system but an actual man. In 2:7, he differentiates the “man of lawlessness” from the “mystery of lawlessness.” And



2 Thessalonians

**UNTIL CHRIST
RETURNS**

besides, the best interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. When Paul says the man of lawlessness “takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2:5) our minds should race to Daniel 9:24-27.

Based on Daniel’s breathtaking prophecy, Jesus refers to the detestable actions of the man of lawlessness as the “abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15), a phrase associated with an evil world leader known as the Antichrist. Thus, the man of lawlessness is none other than the devil-possessed anarchist mentioned in both Old and New Testament prophecies. With the Antichrist in mind, let’s continue reading Paul’s words to the Thessalonians.

Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
2:5-12

Nobody has ever emerged on the world stage that fits the full description of the man of lawlessness, who is also known in Revelation as “the beast.” Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175-164 B.C.) prefigured the future Antichrist when he brought tyranny upon the Jews. Adolf Hitler and others like him enacted terrible atrocities against humanity. But these despots will look like girl scouts compared to the real son of destruction when he rises to power on planet earth following the



2 Thessalonians

**UNTIL CHRIST
RETURNS**

Rapture of the Church. Until then, Paul says the “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work.”²⁹

The Holy Spirit also restrains the man of lawlessness until the appointed time. But when “he who now restrains ... is out of the way,” evil will flood the earth in ways never known before because “the coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan.”³⁰ With false signs and wonders, the devil will deceive those who “refused to love the truth and so be saved.” How will so many people in the world believe the Antichrist’s lies? The Bible says God will also send “a strong delusion.” Now, and leading up to that time, we must stand firm in the truth.

Wait Patiently

Paul’s clarification about the Day of the Lord was hopefully enough to comfort the Thessalonians. But was it enough to change the way they lived? Some had foolishly quit their jobs in anticipation of the Lord’s soon return. They stopped working and decided to wait in idleness for Him. Paul addressed the situation in 3:6-12.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ... For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living

Because the stakes are high, Paul uses the word “command” four times in chapter 3, raising his rhetoric to get their attention and ours. Christians cannot afford to wait in idleness until Jesus returns. The Thessalonians would have waited their entire lives and accomplished



2 Thessalonians **UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS**

nothing. For sure, nobody knows the day or hour of Jesus's coming, which is as imminent for us as it was for the early church two thousand years ago.

Believers in Jesus should expect Christ to come back today! But when He comes, He expects to find us occupied by the work He gave us to do. Christians should wait patiently and expectantly for the Lord's coming and work hard until He comes. Those that do not work should not expect others to feed them.

Paul ends his letter with a final warning to those who do not obey his teaching (3:13-15) followed by a benediction (3:16-18).

In summary, until Christ comes, walk worthy, stand firm, wait patiently, and work hard. And as a final encouragement from me, the next time you sit in the doctor's waiting room, remember this: Christ is coming back sooner than you think!

OUTLINE	1	2	3
FOCUS	Judgment at Christ's Coming <i>Walk Worthy</i>	The Man of Lawlessness <i>Stand Firm</i>	Warning Against Idleness <i>Wait Patiently</i>
KEY VERSE	1:5	2:15	3:10



1 Timothy

GUARDING THE SACRED TRUST

My wife, Cathryn, grew up in a loving Texas home where her parents instructed her and her two brothers in proper behavior. For example, whenever Cathryn went out with her high school friends on a Friday night, the last thing her father said to her before she left the house was this: “Remember who you are, where you come from, and what we stand for. Have a good time!” That was enough to make her think twice about doing something that might embarrass herself and the family.

The church is like a family. In the first letter Paul wrote to a young clergyman named Timothy, the apostle refers to the “household of God” by saying, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth” (3:14-15). In other words, Timothy, remember whose you are, what Christ did for you, and for what the church stands.

Do you know “how one ought to behave in the household of God” so as not to bring reproach to the God of the household? Find



1 Timothy

GUARDING THE SACRED TRUST

out by fastening your seat belt for another ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, this time through the book of First Timothy.

“This Charge I Entrust to You”

The New Testament includes three pastoral epistles penned by the Apostle Paul, which are First and Second Timothy and Titus. Though written for the entire church family, Paul aims these epistolary gems primarily to those who lead the church or an assembly of churches. By providing methodical instruction about the structure and leadership of the church, the pastoral epistles defy people who say they want nothing to do with “organized religion.” On the contrary, God expects the pastors, elders, and deacons of the church to conduct His business in an orderly manner.

The two letters to Timothy contain a “charge” from Paul, who uses his apostolic authority to lay before the young pastor a sacred trust “in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted” (1:11). Paul refers to this charge at least ten times in First and Second Timothy.

For example, in 1:18-19, he writes, “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.” Phrases like “wage the good warfare,” “fight the good fight” (6:12), and “guard the deposit entrusted to you” (6:20) add buoyancy to the charge made by the Apostle Paul to Timothy.

JESUS JUNCTURE

As head of the church, Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man.

BIG IDEA

Pastors must guard the deposit entrusted to them by fighting the good fight.

MEMORY VERSE

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

1 TIMOTHY 2:5

AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul
63-66 A.D.



1 Timothy

GUARDING THE SACRED TRUST

Paul begins chapter 1 with warm, familial greetings filled with grace, mercy, and peace (1:1-2). Quickly, the apostle warns Timothy about “certain persons” who are teaching false doctrines and corrupting the family of God (1:3-11). He describes them as “swerving” and having “wandered away into vain discussions, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.” Dangerous is the religious leader who is confidently wrong.

Paul wastes no time in sharing his personal testimony and robust gospel faith as an antidote to false teaching (1:12-17). Brimming with thanksgiving, the grateful and humble apostle writes, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1:15-16).

Paul closes chapter 1 by warning Timothy about some who “made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.”

Guarding Public Worship

In chapter 2, Paul turns his attention to guarding the deposit of public worship. He begins with a call to lift holy hands and make prayer a priority. “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (2:1-2).

Prayer that orders society in a godly and dignified manner pleases God, “who desires all people to be saved and to come to the



1 Timothy

GUARDING THE SACRED TRUST

knowledge of the truth” (2:3). Paul makes a beeline to the gospel and reminds Timothy and us, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (2:5-6). In the context of this verse, prayer is the engine that drives the gospel to all people.

In 2:8, Paul urges men to lead the church in prayer and not quarrel with each other. While emphasizing the inner qualities of female godliness, Paul instructs women to adorn themselves modestly (2:9-10), learn quietly and submissively (2:11), and not exercise authority over a man in the church (2:12).

The apostle’s instruction to women causes heartburn for some inside and outside the church. However, at least two things get lost in the discussion about the role of women in the church. First, by returning to the relationship between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (2:13-15), Paul appeals to creation, not culture. Second, contrary to Judaism, Paul advances the status of women by bringing them into the Christian church equally with men, though each had different roles to play. In the first century, the synagogue segregated women from men. Even the Jewish temple had a separate entrance for women called the Court of Women. Thus, any suggestion that Christianity is chauvinistic and anti-women is plain false.

Guarding Church Leadership

In chapter 3, Paul rolls into a discussion about church leadership and governance as a means of guarding the deposit entrusted to Timothy. He starts by affirming anyone who aspires to the office of an overseer, saying, “He desires a noble task.” Then, he lays out the qualifications of an elder (3:2-7) followed by those of a deacon (3:8-13).

The moral and spiritual qualifications of elders and deacons are



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similar; the only distinction is that elders must be “able to teach.” He also addresses wives or deaconesses (3:11). In Acts 6:1-7, the apostles installed deacons (*diakonos*) in an official capacity to serve practical needs in the congregation while they, the apostles, devoted themselves to prayer and the preaching of God’s word. In time, the apostolic era ended, and a plurality of elders emerged as the primary leaders in the church.³¹

The New Testament uses three Greek words interchangeably to differentiate elders from deacons, which are translated “bishop” (*presbuteros*), “elder” (*episkopos*), and “pastor” (*poimen*). While the New Testament gives some latitude in how churches structure their polity, at least three forms of church governance emerged over church history in relation to these Greek words: Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Congregational (not to be confused with denominations by those names).

At the church where I serve as lead pastor, we are led by vocational pastors, governed by elders, operated by staff, and served by deacons and lay people. Of course, Jesus Christ is the head of the church and the Chief Shepherd (Ephesians 5:23; 1 Peter 5:4). Any form of church governance works only as well as the people who lead, govern, operate, and serve the body of believers, which is why the qualifications are high and holy for elders and deacons.

Guarding Good Doctrine

In chapter 4, Paul focuses on good doctrine as the means of guarding the sacred trust Timothy inherited from the apostle. “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed” (4:6). This will not be easy for Timothy, or any other pastor, because “the Spirit expressly says that



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in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (4:1).

Regardless of what the future holds, sound doctrine and spiritual disciplines seem to be on Paul’s mind as he mentors Timothy. He urges the young pastor to get into the spiritual gym and work out his faith. “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily training is just slightly beneficial, but godliness is beneficial for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (4:7-8 NAS).

The Greek word translated “discipline” is *gymnazo*, from which we derive the English word “gymnasium.” We do not work *for* our salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9), but we should *work it out* in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12). We do so by practicing spiritual disciplines like prayer, Bible study, Scripture memory, worship, giving, serving, and more.

Paul ends chapter 4 with the kind of motivating words that a spiritual coach or personal disciple-maker might use.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. 4:11-16

Guarding Good Behavior

Good doctrine should lead to good behavior among God’s people. In chapter 5, Paul encourages Timothy to instruct various groups



1 Timothy

GUARDING THE SACRED TRUST

within the church family to engage in good behavior, including older men and women, younger men and women, widows, and elders.

Apparently, there was a problem in the church relating to the care of widows, which prompted Paul to give lengthy instructions about it (5:3-16). On the one hand, the church should care for and honor those who are truly widows. On the other hand, “if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God” (5:4). In all things related to those who need care, the church should use discernment, “for some have already strayed after Satan” (5:16).

The church should also honor pastors who serve well, “especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (5:17). The first half of the verse says, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor.” The phrase translated “double honor” from the Greek language is a financial term. In other words, pay your pastors well! To make his point, Paul draws upon Old Testament Scripture, which says, “‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages’” (5:18).

Paul also warns, “Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses” (5:19). In other words, any accusation of wrongdoing against a pastor or elder should come with the kind of evidence that stands up in a court of law. The church should not tolerate frivolous, baseless, or graceless charges against its leaders, which are characteristic of a cancel culture.

Guarding Yourself and Others

Paul’s charge to Timothy about guarding the sacred trust ends with instructions to employers and employees (6:1-2) and about false teachers (6:3-5). Then, he urges contentment in all things (6:6-10) and



1 Timothy

GUARDING THE SACRED TRUST

offers a warning about money. “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” He gives specific instruction to those who are “rich in this present age,” urging them to “do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share” (6:17-19).

Finally, Paul reminds Timothy that guarding the sacred trust is a spiritual battle, and it will not be easy. He must “fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (6:12). He charges Timothy one more time to “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:13-15).

The first thing a pastor or spiritual leader must do is guard his own relationship with God. Perhaps the best way to do that is to remember whose you are, what Christ did for you, and for what the church stands.

OUTLINE	1	2	3	4	5	6
FOCUS	The Sacred Charge	Guarding Public Worship	Guarding Church Leadership	Guarding Good Doctrine	Guarding Good Behavior	Guarding Yourself and Others
KEY VERSE	1:15	2:5	3:1	4:7-8	5:19	6:12



2 Timothy

KEEPING THE FAITH

My high school football coach taught his players how to finish well, which for a football team means playing hard on every down until the whistle blows and doing so through four full quarters. As players, how did we learn this important life lesson from our coach?

At the end of practice, the team ran conditioning sprints in groups according to our position—backs and receivers, offensive line, defensive line, defensive backs, and special teams. While we started on the goal line, our coach straddled the 40-yard line, leaning over with his hands on his knees to watch how we ran across the finish line. If anybody on the team slowed down before crossing the 40-yard line, the coach added to the number of sprints the entire team ran until everybody ran through the finish line at full speed. Got the picture? You guessed it. Sometimes we ran sprints until sunset.

In the game of life, some people are good starters but poor finishers. Do you have any unfinished projects around the house? More importantly, what does finishing life well look like to you? Near the end of his life, the Apostle Paul wrote a second letter to a young pastor named Timothy. Chronologically, Second Timothy was



2 Timothy

KEEPING THE FAITH

also Paul's final New Testament epistle. In the final chapter of his final written communication, the aging apostle reflects upon his life and ministry.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. 4:6-8

I like to think of these words as Paul running his two-minute drill, something every football team practices so they know how to win inside the last two minutes of the game. As his personal game clock was winding down, Paul anticipated finishing well. Without giving up and in full view of his eternal reward, the great apostle claimed his victory.

Guard the Deposit

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, he continues the charge he began in First Timothy. In 1:14, he even repeats, "By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (compare 1 Timothy 6:20).

Paul begins by expressing his sincere thanksgiving for the spiritual heritage Timothy received from faithful members of his family, "a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well" (1:5). He encourages the

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ
"abolished death
and brought life and
immortality to light
through the gospel"
(1:10).

BIG IDEA

Keep the faith and
finish well.

MEMORY VERSE

All Scripture is
breathed out by God
and profitable for
teaching, for reproof,
for correction,
and for training in
righteousness, that
the man of God
may be complete,
equipped for every
good work.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

AUTHOR and DATE

Paul
67 A.D.



2 Timothy

KEEPING THE FAITH

young pastor to “fan into flame the gift of God.” In other words, do not waste your upbringing in a home filled with faithful servants of God. Follow their good example as you follow Christ.

I can think of more than a few young people who grew up in a Christian home that need to heed those words. If God used your parents or grandparents to spark faith in you, now you must fan the spark into a flame.

Although Timothy personally embraced the faith in God that he saw modeled in his family, he must have been timid about it because Paul says to him, “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (1:7). Apparently, some felt embarrassed because of Paul’s sufferings for the gospel. But the great apostle of Christ admonished Timothy not to be among those who were “ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner.”

Paul goes on to admit that he suffered because God appointed him “a preacher and apostle and teacher” (1:11). Then, he declares with the same confidence he wants to see in Timothy, “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me” (1:12).

Paul closes chapter 1 by mentioning those in Asia who abandoned him. The names Phygelus and Hermogenes pricked his heart like a thorn bush. On a more positive note, he acknowledges Onesiphorus, “for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains” (1:16-18). Apparently, when others had turned away from Paul, Onesiphorus—whose name sounds like a cool, refreshing stream of water—arrived in Rome and did not stop until he located Paul and enjoyed fellowship with him. Do you have a friend like that? Better yet, like Onesiphorus do you look for ways to refresh others, especially when they are going through a tough time?



2 Timothy

KEEPING THE FAITH

An Approved Workman

Paul begins chapter 2 with words that have inspired followers of Jesus Christ and committed disciple-makers for two thousand years. “You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2:1-2).

The Great Commission echoes inside Paul’s rhetoric. Can you hear Jesus saying to His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20)? The Savior’s grand plan is for us to make disciples of Jesus Christ who go and make disciples. In other words, is your life in Christ creating a ripple effect? Are you replicating Jesus in you by making disciples who follow Him? According to Paul, it takes the tenacity of a soldier, discipline of an athlete, and hard work of a farmer to pull this off, even with the help of the Holy Spirit (2:3-7).

Paul goes on, encouraging Timothy to serve in a manner that God approves. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2:15). The King James translation of the Bible says, “Study to show thyself approved.”

The Lord’s approved worker must spend time studying God’s word so that he can handle it well before the church family. Second Timothy 2:15 always reminds me of AWANA, which is a fruitful disciple-making ministry to children and students. The ministry organization crafted its name from Paul’s impactful words to Timothy; AWANA stands for “approved workmen are not ashamed.”

The Lord’s approved workman also avoids “irreverent babble,” which swerves from the truth (2:16-18). Furthermore, the pastor who is an approved workman must rightly handle himself. Paul urges



2 Timothy

KEEPING THE FAITH

Timothy to “depart from iniquity” (2:19) and then launches into an illustration about honorable and dishonorable vessels inside a great house, concluding, “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.”

Ironically, the name Timothy comes from two Greek words, which together mean “God-honoring.” Paul is telling Timothy to live up to his name!³² One way to live a God-honoring life is to “flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2:22-23).

Finally, an approved workman “must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness (2:24-25).

Equipped for Good Works

In chapter 3, Paul shifts his attention from the pastor and his present persecutions to the pastor and the “last days.” His mind raced to the end of the age before the return of Jesus Christ (3:1-5).

Paul’s sobering words read almost like today’s headline news, putting the depravity of humankind on full display. The last three words in 3:5 are strong: “Avoid such people.” This is a good time to examine the relationships in your life. Who do you hang out with? Who are you allowing to influence you? Paul makes it clear that such people in that deplorable list “will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all” (3:6-9).

Then, Paul pivots to the inspiration and profitability of the word of God (3:16-17). The world says, “Michelangelo was an inspired artist,” but that is not how inspiration applies to the Holy Scriptures. The word translated “inspiration” literally means *God-breathed*. It speaks of how the Holy Spirit supernaturally influenced the biblical



2 Timothy

KEEPING THE FAITH

writers so that what they wrote was true, accurate, and trustworthy.

Because all Scripture is “breathed out by God,” the Bible is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” According to Warren Wiersbe, that means the Bible tells us what is right, what is wrong, how to get right, and how to stay right.³³ Another athletic analogy works here, too. Think of the Bible as a teacher, umpire, coach, and personal trainer, all rolled into one book, which is God’s holy word. By it, we grow in holiness, avoid falling into sin, and win the game of life.

Furthermore, like the equipment manager on a football team, the Bible makes the man of God “equipped for every good work.” Can you imagine a football player stepping onto the gridiron without his helmet, shoulder pads, and cleats? He is hardly ready to face the battle on the field without the proper equipment. Likewise, the word of God equips us for the work God gives to us and the spiritual battles we will surely face.

No wonder Paul says to Timothy in 3:14-15, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Christian parents should use these verses to encourage their children who grew up in the faith like Timothy.

Preach the Word

Chapter 4 begins with Paul’s final charge to Timothy, which includes the phrase “preach the word” (4:1-5). The seminary where I earned my master’s degree in theology chiseled that phrase into a stone monument on the front lawn. That visual and those words are burned into my memory, as is Paul’s charge to Timothy. Are we not



2 Timothy

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living in a time when people do not “endure sound doctrine” and have “itching ears”? However, now more than ever, the servant of God must preach the word of God, not his own opinion.

Paul closes this chapter and book with some of the most personal words found anywhere in his New Testament epistles (4:9-22). In his final days, the great apostle is alone and bids Timothy, “Do you best to come to me soon” (4:9) and “do your best to come before winter” (4:21).

Paul mentions the names of seventeen people associated with his ministry and friendship. He drops in greetings as easily as he does warnings, like the one about Alexander the coppersmith, who “did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.”

Absent bitterness and unforgiveness, Paul mentions those who deserted him during his first defense. He graciously lays the painful experience down by saying, “May it not be charged against them!” and quickly remembers how “the Lord stood by me and strengthened me.”

The word respect comes to mind when I consider how the Apostle Paul finished his life and ministry. I picture him sprinting across the 40-yard line with his last burst of energy, while saying, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

OUTLINE	1	2	3	4
FOCUS	Guard the Deposit	An Approved Workman	Equipped for Good Works	Preach the Word
	The Pastor and Persecutions		The Pastor and Prophecy	
	Present		Future	
KEY VERSE	1:14	2:15	3:16-17	4:7



Titus

PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER

Since the beginning of time, God has been putting things in order. For example, the earth was in a chaotic state—dark, formless, and void—when God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:2). Our Creator proceeded to put the whole universe in order in six twenty-four-hour days, including the blue planet in the Milky Way that we call home.

Some people call it divine design. Such orderliness means planets remain in their orbits, the moon travels through predictable phases, seasons come and go and come again, and apple seeds grow into apple trees. Today, the laws of physics apply to our lives as much as they did to generations of humans who lived before us.

What God ordered became chaotic again when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, the paradise for which the Lord created them and us. Disease and death resulted, as did deception, despair, confusion, pain, and suffering. We live in a fallen, broken world. The whole creation groans (Romans 8:22).

Quickly, however, God placed into motion His plan to reorder our lives through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, the



Titus

PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER

Lord Jesus Christ. It took time for our Savior to arrive as predicted (Galatians 4:4-7). But two thousand years ago, He paid the penalty for our sin, purchased our redemption, and offered eternal life to all who place their faith in Him.

Following His glorious resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ put His followers into an ordered assembly. He began a holy enterprise called the church, which He said He would build by using “living stones . . . built up as a spiritual household,” with Himself as the Chief Cornerstone (Matthew 16:18; 1 Peter 2:4-5). Though the Savior is perfect in every way, imperfect and sometimes disorderly people make up His church.

I believe the Apostle Paul possessed the theological capacity to have all of this in mind when he wrote a letter to Titus, saying, “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (1:5).

After his first Roman imprisonment, Paul made his way to Crete and spread the gospel there. Acts 2:11 tells us that Jews from Crete were present on the day of Pentecost. Perhaps they placed their faith in Christ and introduced the gospel to the island people.

Either way, I think you will enjoy our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible as we visit a Greek island in the Mediterranean Sea called Crete. But don’t let the warm, tropical, serene setting deceive you. Crete is the place where Paul left his ministry colleague to bring order to a disorderly church. Fortunately, Titus did not run away from a difficult assignment, having served on Paul’s ministry team for many years. Paul calls Titus “my true child in a common faith” (1:4)

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is our great God and Savior.

BIG IDEA

Orderliness in the church pleases and glorifies God.

MEMORY VERSE

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

TITUS 3:5

AUTHOR AND DATE

Paul
63-66 A.D.



Titus

PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER

and refers to his Greek-born friend eleven more times in the New Testament.

Qualified Leadership

Paul begins his letter to Titus in the deep end of theology (1:1-4). He wants him to understand the centrality of God’s word as it relates to the elect and eternal life. After offering Titus “grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior,” the apostle turns his attention to the first and best way to bring order to a disorderly church.

Identifying qualified leaders to oversee the faith community must be a priority when putting things in order (1:5-9). It should not surprise us that the list of elder qualifications in Titus looks like those in 1 Timothy. Jesus Christ is the same to all people and in all places. Whether the locale is Ephesus or Crete, a big city or small town, the mainland or an island, shepherding God’s people well always starts with the leader’s godly character.

In the book of Titus, Paul adds to the list of elder qualifications found in his other pastoral letters, including that the elder’s children must be believers (1:6b) and he must view himself as “God’s steward” (1:7a). Negatively, the elder must not be “arrogant” (1:7a) or “quick-tempered” (1:7b). Positively, he must be a “lover of good” (1:8b), “self-controlled” (1:8c), “upright” (1:8d), and “holy” (1:8e). Finally, Paul adds, “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (1:9).

In his book, *The Measure of a Man*, pastor and author Gene Getz applies the totality of elder qualifications found in the pastoral letters to men broadly. He suggests that any man does well to measure himself by the qualities God expects to find in His leaders and then,



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with the help of the Holy Spirit, strive to live by that standard in daily practice.

Paul goes on to warn Titus of the many false teachers, “who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party” (1:10). Qualified pastors (also called elders) must do more than share mere heart-warming devotional thoughts from the pulpit; they must also protect the doctrine of the church and refute false teachers. John Calvin, the great theological reformer, said, “The pastor ought to have two voices; one for gathering the sheep and another for driving away wolves.”

Who was Paul warning about but loyal Jews who had made their way to the island of Crete and spread their theological gangrene? These were the same Judaizers found in Jerusalem and Galatia who demanded strict adherence to the Mosaic Law as part of the gospel. In Galatians, Paul had already refuted their false teaching strongly. Warren Wiersbe is correct when he writes, “Wherever God sows the truth, Satan quickly shows up to sow lies.”³⁴

Apparently, the beautiful Mediterranean island was full of liars, some having crept into the church. Paul pulls no punches by quoting a well-known Cretan who said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” Paul knew that underestimating the enemies of the gospel was dangerous for the pastor and church. Therefore, the apostle instructs Titus to “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (1:13). He also draws a strong contrast between the pure minds of biblically qualified leaders and those who are “unfit for any good work.”

To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. 1:15-16



Titus

PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER

Sound Doctrine

Paul begins chapter two by directing Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (2:1). What is sound doctrine? The word “sound” refers to something that is *healthy*. Thus, sound doctrine is the teaching of healthy, biblical truth.

Sound doctrine is the missing ingredient in many churches today, which are led by pastors who feed their congregations spiritual junk food. I am not saying that sound doctrine should be boring or unsatisfying; it is not like eating your vegetables. However, a healthy church results from a steady diet of biblical teaching from its pastors. For this reason and more, Paul said to Timothy, “Preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Someone once defined doctrine as “teaching from God about God that directs us to the glory of God.”³⁵ Furthermore, teaching sound doctrine presupposes there is a direct correlation between what we think and how we act. If you think you can fly, for example, you might be tempted to jump off a bridge. Therefore, knowing the truth about the aerodynamics of the human body is a life and death matter. Sound biblical doctrine directs our thinking and behavior to matters of eternal life and death.

Paul gets specific about teaching sound doctrine to various groups—older and younger men, older and younger women, and slaves (2:2-11). Specifically, what should Titus teach them and how? Paul urges Titus to teach them about “the grace of God,” and that salvation is for “all people” (2:11). Teach them to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions” and “wait for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2:12-13). Teach “with all authority” and “let no one disregard you” (2:15).



Titus

PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER

Grace and Good Works

Paul reminds Titus six times of the importance of good works resulting from salvation (1:6, 2:7, 14, 3:1, 8, 14). He begins chapter 3 with an emphasis on good Christian citizenship by saying, “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (3:1-2).

Keep in mind that Christians living in Crete fell under the strong, oppressive arm of the mighty Roman Empire. However, Paul encouraged courtesy and good works as a proper response from believers in Jesus, not counterrevolution. He also reminded Titus about the “goodness and lovingkindness of God” toward all believers.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. 3:3-8

The Christian’s life should overflow with good works, not as a means of achieving salvation, which Jesus Christ our Savior already purchased for us. But good works are a demonstration of God’s grace and “profitable for people.” In the same breath, Paul warned Titus about troublemakers in the church and offered a strong response to anyone who “stirs up division.”



Titus

PUTTING THINGS IN ORDER

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.
3:9-11

Paul ends his letter with a final encouragement to put things in order with good works. After some logistical instructions to others on the ministry team, namely, Artemis, Tychicus, Zenas the lawyer, and Apollos, he writes, “And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful” (3:14).

Is your Christian life producing the fruit of good works? Are qualified pastors and elders leading your church? Do you hear sound doctrine regularly? A disorderly church is a disaster, unfruitful, and certainly not enjoyable for worshippers. Now is the time to put things in order by letting the light of God’s truth shine into those dark, formless, and void places in your life and ministry.

OUTLINE	1	2	3
FOCUS	Qualified Leaders	Sound Doctrine	Good Works
KEY VERSE	1:5	2:1	3:5



Philemon

FREEDOM, FORGIVENESS, AND SECOND CHANCES

Letter writing is a lost art. Texting and tweeting in 140 characters or less has replaced the practice of sitting down with paper and pen and putting into words your thoughts to a friend. And yet, some of the most timeless literature we possess today are simple but powerful letters written by people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Bertrand Russell, and Nelson Mandela. Surprisingly, they each wrote from prison, as did the Apostle Paul.

The New Testament includes four prison epistles by Paul, including a short but deeply personal letter he wrote to a friend named Philemon on behalf of a runaway slave named Onesimus. Our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible is a Pauline epistle, which is all about freedom, forgiveness, and second chances.

Do you need a second chance? Do you need to offer forgiveness and a second chance to somebody who has wronged you? Are you held captive by an unforgiving spirit? With his own hand (1:19), Paul writes one chapter and only twenty-five verses, compelling his friend to receive back a broken but redeemed mutual friend who is profitable to both men. He also teaches an important gospel lesson



Philemon

**FREEDOM, FORGIVENESS,
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about God's grace.

Philemon is the only private letter Paul wrote that survived among his New Testament epistles. J. Sidlow Baxter describes the brief epistle as a “graceful little masterpiece of fine courtesy, exquisite tact, and even playfulness of wit.”

The Background Story

Let's get to know the main characters in Paul's letter. Who is Philemon? Who is Onesimus? Paul draws Timothy into the already-formed friendship circle and then writes, “To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house” (1-2). Paul continues by heaping much praise on Philemon, whom he calls “my brother” (4-7). His affection for his friend ran deep, and what he was about to say to him could put their relationship at risk.

Most likely, Apphia was Philemon's wife, and Archippus was their son. They hosted a small congregation in their home, making Philemon a local church leader. Although Paul had never visited Colosse, the city was not far from Ephesus. Philemon and Paul might have become friends during the apostle's three-year ministry in Ephesus. Archippus appears to have been the pastor at Colosse or nearby Laodicea (Colossians 4:17).

Paul's earlier letter to the Colossians suggests that Philemon lived in Colosse and was probably part of the upper class socially and economically. As a wealthy freeman, he owned household

JESUS JUNCTURE

Jesus Christ is freedom from the slavery of sin.

BIG IDEA

The Gospel according to Philemon is all about freedom, forgiveness, and second chances.

MEMORY VERSE

If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

PHILEMON 1:18

AUTHOR and DATE

Paul
61 A.D.



Philemon

**FREEDOM, FORGIVENESS,
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slaves, including one named Onesimus. Together, Tychicus and Onesimus carried the epistle to the Colossians from Rome to Colosse (Colossians 4:7-9); they also carried the short, private letter from Paul to Philemon.

Verse 18 indicates that Onesimus stole money from his master, Philemon, and fled to Rome. By God's grace and providence, the fugitive met and made friends with Paul, who led Onesimus to faith in Christ. Newly converted, Onesimus quickly grew in God's grace and became profitable to Paul's ministry, even while he was in prison. Ironically, the name Onesimus means "useful or profitable." Paul skillfully uses this idea in his letter to Philemon, saying, "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me)" (10-11).

Roman law gave Philemon the authority to invoke the death penalty on Onesimus, his runaway slave. However, on behalf of Onesimus, Paul appeals to Philemon based on their shared brotherhood in Christ. Paul argued that Onesimus's relationship with Philemon had changed. They were no longer merely master and slave; now, they were both part of the family of God. For that reason, Onesimus was useful and profitable to Philemon. Paul admits that he wanted to keep Onesimus with him in Rome. However, Onesimus rightfully belonged to Philemon. Legally, his fate and future were in his master's hands, which Paul respected (8-17).

To make the way forward more appealing to Philemon, Paul assumed all of Onesimus' financial obligations. He writes, "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ" (18-20). Paul removed any reason for Philemon to reject his gracious appeal.



Philemon

**FREEDOM. FORGIVENESS.
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As quickly as he cleared any damages owed by the runaway slave with an “I owe you” to Philemon, the sly apostle turns the “I owe you” into a “you owe me.”

Paul closes with greetings from five fellow workers in Christ. “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers” (23-24). These verses provide an important reminder that Christianity is deeply relational and personal.

We cannot live the Christian life successfully while disconnected from a biblical community of Christ-followers whom we passionately run with as we follow hard after Jesus. Paul mentions these names after already saying how the church met in Philemon’s home. Practicing one’s faith does not get more personal than a small group of people that meet for worship, Bible study, fellowship, and prayer in your own home. Are you part of a small group like that?

On the surface, the principles and applications that arise from this brief visit on the ultimate road trip through the Bible are obvious. Are you deeply drenched in relational Christianity made possible by a local church near you? Is there someone you should forgive, as the Lord has forgiven you? Is there someone like Onesimus in your life who has wronged you and to whom you should extend God’s grace and give a second chance? Paul begins and ends his letter with grace.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (3)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. (25)

These are powerful applications to prayerfully consider. But there is more to this brief epistle than what appears on the surface. Before we get to what is less obvious, I must address a question that often arises from Philemon about the Apostle Paul and the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire.



Paul and Slavery

What should we understand about Paul's view of slavery? If slavery is wrong, why did he not use his apostolic authority to speak against the institution that held between five and ten million humans in bondage throughout the Roman Empire? Does Paul's silence condone slavery? Foolhardy is the person who thinks that way of Christ's apostle.

Had Paul merely railed on slavery like a political activist and called for the freedom of all shackled humans, his words might have shredded society and been lost forever. Instead, Paul offered what the activist cannot: True freedom in Christ. Christianity does more than free slaves; it teaches that slaves and masters are one in Christ. In that way, Paul's letter to Philemon weakened the institution of slavery and began the abolition of it without the use of political pressure tactics.

Christianity breaks down the damaging hierarchy in social relationships and nullifies worldly rank. For example, faith in Jesus Christ dignifies the slave, emancipates women, and demands social justice for all human beings who are created equally in the image of God. To the Galatians, Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). A life transformed by Jesus Christ will change social evils and inequities quicker than any law or government program.

Of course, slavery still exists in parts of our world and is a terrible evil. The thought of one human being owning another is repulsive. Slavery stained the early history of the United States of America, a nation founded upon Judea-Christian values. Today, human trafficking is slavery by another name and tactic. But this present reality does not erase the powerful influence of Christianity and its ability to blunt slavery's stronghold. As Paul also wrote to the



Galatians, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

The Gospel According to Philemon

Now, back to what is perhaps less obvious in Paul’s letter to Philemon. I call it the gospel according to Philemon. What do I mean by that? Let’s start with an observation made by Martin Luther, the Roman Catholic monk who sparked the Protestant Reformation. He correctly said, “We are all Onesimuses!” Onesimus was a runaway cracked pot, broken by the cruelty of Roman slavery plus his poor personal choices that led to thievery. Romans 3:23 summarizes the human condition, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Like Onesimus, we are sinners who fall short of God’s holy standard, which is the bad news we must all embrace before the Gospel becomes good news. But the bad news gets worse. Also, like Onesimus, the death penalty awaits us. Romans 6:23a says, “The wages of sin is death.”

Furthermore, like Onesimus, someone else paid the penalty for our sin, and that’s good news! Paul said to Philemon, “If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account” (18).

Through Christ’s substitutionary death upon the cross, our Savior paid the penalty for our sin and purchased our redemption. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” And in the same way that Paul played the mediator between Onesimus and his owner, Philemon, Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

Finally, believers in Jesus Christ are no longer slaves to sin but



Philemon

**FREEDOM, FORGIVENESS,
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slaves to righteousness. Romans 6:17-18 says, “But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.” More so, by faith, we are brothers and sisters in Christ, siblings in the family of God (15-16).

How glorious is the Gospel according to this brief letter to Philemon! In Christ, we are set free from the penalty and power of sin, forgiven, and given a second chance to live for God. Seize the moment and place your faith in Jesus Christ right now. And if you already possess the gift of eternal life, share the good news with someone else by writing them a personal letter today.

OUTLINE	1-3	4-7	8-17	18-22	23-25
FOCUS	Peace from God	Praise for Philemon	Appeal for Onesimus	Pledge from Paul	Greetings from all
KEY VERSE	3	7	11	18	25



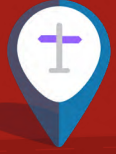


ROMANS

1. Describe the flow of the book of Romans. What is Paul's theological argument?
 2. Consider Romans 1-3. What does Paul say about the human condition?
 3. Consider Romans 4-5. What does Paul argue about God's remedy?
 4. Consider Romans 6-8. Who or what is the key to living the Christian life successfully?
 5. Why does Paul write Romans 9-11?
-

1 CORINTHIANS

1. What major problems did the apostle Paul address in his letter to the Corinthians?
2. How did the apostle Paul try to unite the Corinthians?
3. What moral disorders did Paul address, and what did he say about them?
4. What is the significance of chapter 13, Paul's treatise on love, in the overall context of the letter?
5. What part of your life looks more like California than Christ?



2 CORINTHIANS

1. Why did Paul write his second letter to the Corinthians?
 2. Name three ways Paul described his ministry in chapters 1-7.
 3. Consider 2 Corinthians 8-9. What does Paul teach the Corinthians and us about generosity?
 4. How did Paul specifically address his opposition in chapters 10-13?
 5. What can you do to support your pastors who shepherd the flock of God?
-

GALATIANS

1. Read Galatians 1:6. What concerned Paul enough to write the letter to the Galatians?
2. What is Galatianism? What “other gospels” should concern us today?
3. What does “freedom from religion” mean in terms of salvation and sanctification?
4. What is the purpose of the Mosaic law?
5. According to Galatians 5:16-26, what role does the Holy Spirit play in our freedom in Christ?



EPHESIANS

1. How does Ephesians 1 describe our spiritual wealth in Christ?
 2. Read Ephesians 2:8-10 and describe basic Christianity.
 3. Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and describe the impact of the gospel on ethnic relationships?
 4. What is the mystery of Christ and His church?
 5. Review Ephesians 5:22-6:9. How does the gospel impact marriage, family, and work relationships?
-

PHILIPPIANS

1. In a single verse from Paul's letter to the Philippians, summarize his big idea.
2. Why did Paul write his letter to the Philippians?
3. Read Philippians 1:21 and relate the verse to your life.
4. Read Philippians 3:12-14. Describe the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
5. How does contentment relate to joy?



COLOSSIANS

1. Why did Paul write his letter to the Colossians?
 2. Why is fake news about Jesus Christ so damaging?
What can believers do about it?
 3. How did Paul describe a believer's new identity in Christ?
 4. Read Colossians 3:5. What does Paul mean by "put to death therefore what is earthly in you"?
 5. In what ways does Paul demonstrate that Jesus is greater than?
-

1 THESSALONIANS

1. Why did Paul write his letters to the Thessalonians?
What can we learn from the circumstances he was facing at the time?
2. What does Paul's fond affection for the Thessalonians say about his pastoral concern?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11. Why is Bible prophecy a source of encouragement to believers?
4. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. Who is responsible for your salvation and sanctification?
5. Consider Acts 17:1-9. What would it look like for your faith in Christ to turn the world upside down?



2 THESSALONIANS

1. Why did Paul write a second letter to the Thessalonians?
 2. What does it mean to walk worthy of the kingdom of God?
 3. Consider the deception of the future man of lawlessness. Who is he? How can believers stand firm in the truth?
 4. Who or what is the restrainer Paul talks about in chapter 2? What happens when he is taken out of the way?
 5. What mistake did the Thessalonians make in response to the Lord's coming? How did Paul instruct them and us?
-

1 TIMOTHY

1. Name the three Pastoral Epistles. Why did Paul write them and to whom?
2. Describe the sacred deposit Paul instructed Timothy to guard.
3. How did Paul instruct Timothy to "guard the deposit"?
4. Interact with the qualifications of elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. Why are they important to consider for leaders in the church?
5. How does Paul instruct Timothy to guard himself?



2 TIMOTHY

1. Reflect upon the charge Paul made to Timothy and what 1 and 2 Timothy have in common.
 2. What are the characteristics of “an approved workman” found in chapter 2?
 3. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Describe how these verses should inform our view of Scripture.
 4. What does finishing well in life look like to you?
 5. Read 2 Timothy 4:9-22. How would you characterize Paul’s final words in the final chapter of his final letter?
-

TITUS

1. What does divine design and the orderliness in the universe say about God?
2. Why did Paul write this letter to Titus?
3. Describe the church culture on the island of Crete.
4. How did Paul instruct Titus to put things in order?
5. What areas of your life and ministry need to be put in order?

Small Group Discussion Questions



PHILEMON

1. Who was Philemon and why did Paul write a letter to him?
2. Who was Onesimus and what did he do wrong?
3. Did Paul address the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire? Why or why not?
4. How did Paul show God's grace to Onesimus?
5. Using Paul's letter to Philemon, explain the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- ¹ Norman Geisler, *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pg. 94.
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- ² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 1-8*, Moody Press, p. xi.
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- ³ *Commentaries of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Baker, p. 1.
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- ⁴ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, Kregel, p. xiii.
-
- ⁵ Imagine placing an order for a new laptop computer. However, it arrives with a corrupted operating system. That describes the human condition perfectly. We are born into this world corrupted by sin, which is why we need the righteousness of God applied to our life through Jesus Christ. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.
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- ⁶ The word “sanctify” means “to set apart for a holy purpose.” In the spiritual life, sanctification describes how God shapes us more and more into the image of Christ.
-
- ⁷ An understanding of positional, progressive, and perfect sanctification is needed to fully grasp this grand section of Scripture. Positional sanctification refers to our standing in Christ, having been delivered from the penalty of sin in the past. Progressive sanctification speaks of how the believer in Christ is presently being set apart from the power of sin. Perfect sanctification refers to the believer’s future in heaven when Christ will free us from the presence of sin.
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- ⁸ The Open Bible, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 1308.
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- ⁹ An alternative view says that Paul wrote four letters to the Corinthians: (1) the previously letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, (2) the Bible’s First Corinthians, (3) a tearful letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, and (4) the Bible’s Second Corinthians. The three-letter view assumes the anguished letter to which Paul refers in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4 is First Corinthians, and the sinner to forgive in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 is the immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5, who has since repented.

¹⁰ One of my seminary professors, Dr. Howard Hendricks, added, “Leadership limits our liberty. Others can but leaders can’t.”

¹¹ We should also consider the interplay between Christian liberty, licentious living, and legalism.

¹² See also Luke 6:38

¹³ Tithing predates the Mosaic law by more than four hundred years. Both Jacob and Abraham practiced tithing. After a war that rescued his nephew Lot, Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils to King Melchizedek of Salem (which later became Jerusalem), who was priest of God Most High. Significantly, the writer of Hebrews tells us that Melchizedek was an Old Testament type of Christ (Hebrews 7). Thus, tithing was a lifestyle and worship practice long before it became a law handed down from Sinai. When God wanted to teach His chosen people how to live generously, He gave them the tithing laws, which were like financial stewardship training wheels until generosity became a way of life for them.

¹⁴ According to Douglas Moo in his book, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, Galatians “has the highest proportion of occurrences of *nomos* (“law”) of any Pauline letter (p. 57).

¹⁵ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Artemis was a Greek pagan god, known by the Romans as Diana.

¹⁷ Ephesians is one of four “prison epistles” Paul wrote during his first Roman imprisonment in A.D. 60-62. Others include Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Customarily, Paul lays out his doctrine (1-3) followed by the Christian’s duties and responsibilities (4-6).

¹⁸ Paul mentions the “heavenly realms” five times in his letter to the Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12).

¹⁹ Similarly, in Galatians 5:16 Paul writes, “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

²⁰ Penn State University Libraries, “Fake News,” accessed on March 21, 2022, <https://guides.libraries.psu.edu/fakenews>

²¹ William Barclay, *Daily Bible Study: Colossians*, p. 72.

²² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Complete*, p. 127.

²³ Other New Testament passages that point to the Rapture are the following: John 14:1-6; Romans 8:19; 1 Corinthians 1:7-8, 15:51-53; 16:22, Philippians 3:20-21, 4:5; Colossians 3:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:28; James 5:7-9; 1 Peter 1:7, 13, 5:4; 1 John 2:28-32; Jude 1:21; Revelation 3:20.

²⁴ The seven years between the Rapture and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ are known variously in Bible prophecy as the Tribulation, Daniel's Seventieth Week (Daniel 9:24-27), and Jacob's trouble.

²⁵ Differences between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ include: (1) Christ comes in the air at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), but comes to the earth at His Second Coming (Zechariah 14:4); (2) believers depart the earth at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), but unbelievers depart the earth at the Second Coming (Matthew 24:37-41); (3) the Rapture is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but the Second Coming is prophesied many times in the Old Testament, (4) Christ comes to reward His saints at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:17), but He comes to judge unbelievers at His Second Coming (Matthew 25:31-46), and (5) only believers will see Jesus at the Rapture, which happens “in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), but the entire world will see Jesus at His Second Coming (Matthew 24:27; Revelation 1:7).

²⁶ According to Mark Hitchcock, a pastor and Bible prophecy expert, “Paul shifts to a new topic with the words ‘Now as to’ (peri de in Greek). This Greek phrase is one of Paul's favorite ways to change subjects in his letters. He uses it this way repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 7-16. So, it's clear that he is finished dealing with the Rapture at this point. But what is the next subject in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9? It's the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Why is this new topic significant? Because it suggests a clear order

of events. The Rapture is mentioned first, followed by the Tribulation” (*The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days*, p. 156).

²⁷ King and McGaw Galleries, A Doctor’s Waiting Room, accessed on April 6, 2022, https://www.kingandmcgaw.com/prints/l-s-lowry/a-doctor-s-waiting-room-1920-431334#431334::border:50_frame:880229_glass:770007_media:1_mount:108644_mount-width:50_size:620,459

²⁸ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Exploring the Book*, p. 225.

²⁹ The “defund the police” mantra of 2021 is an example of the “mystery of lawlessness” already at work and gaining momentum in our world.

³⁰ It makes sense that the restrainer, the Holy Spirit, is lifted when the church is raptured from this earth (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Then, the Antichrist will rise to power. In *Explore the Book*, J. Sidlow Baxter says, “[The devil] will enter and possess this human being in a way never known before, and with wide powers he will exercise awful tyranny over millions—first deceiving and then enslaving them.”

³¹ A plurality of elders does not mean that the church should be led by committee, which is neither practical nor biblical. A careful reading of the book of Acts indicates that James was clearly the point leader of the Jerusalem church, though a plurality of elders served the assembly. Likewise, Paul installed a plurality of elders at the church in Ephesus. However, he writes two letters to Timothy, charging him, the new pastor, with the task of guarding the deposit entrusted to him. Of course, one way of doing that was for Timothy to install other qualified, godly men who would serve as elders and deacons.

³² Warren Wiersbe, *Be Faithful*, p. 137.

³³ *IBID*, p. 150.

³⁴ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Faithful*, p. 97.

³⁵ Scott Swain, “What is Sound Doctrine,” Ligonier.org, access on May 5, 2022, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-sound-doctrine>

About the Author



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Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio and Television exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife Cathryn lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 26 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children.

ROUTE 66

The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time, but it can also be intimidating to read because it contains more than 600,000 words divided into 66 distinct books written by 40 authors in three original languages over 1600 years. But how does it all fit together? In Route 66, Dr. Ron Jones takes us on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, pointing us to Jesus from Genesis to Revelation.

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Road Trip 4: The Major Prophets

Road Trip 5: The Minor Prophets

Road Trip 6: The Gospels and the Early Church

Road Trip 7: The Pauline Epistles

Road Trip 8: The General Epistles and Revelation

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