



COLOSSIANS *and* PHILEMON

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Christopher A. Beetham



J. I. Packer

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

Dane C. Ortlund

SERIES EDITOR

“This series is a tremendous resource for those wanting to study and teach the Bible with an understanding of how the gospel is woven throughout Scripture. Here are gospel-minded pastors and scholars doing gospel business from all the Scriptures. This is a biblical and theological feast preparing God’s people to apply the entire Bible to all of life with heart and mind wholly committed to Christ’s priorities.”

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KNOWING THE BIBLE

J. I. Packer, Theological Editor
Dane C. Ortlund, Series Editor
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Genesis	Matthew	Galatians
Exodus	Mark	Philippians
Ruth/Esther	Luke	Colossians/Philemon
Psalms	John	Hebrews
Proverbs	Acts	James
Isaiah	Romans	Revelation
Daniel	1 Corinthians	

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Christopher A. Beetham

 **CROSSWAY**

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, for help in understanding the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at www.esvbible.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

Paul's letter to the Colossians is a jewel of Christian Scripture. Only four chapters long, it is easy to read through in one sitting, yet it provides stunning vistas of the perfections of Christ that few other New Testament documents can match in such short space. Its majestic hymn of Christ at 1:15–20 is rivaled only by that of Philippians 2:5–11. The letter therefore provides a feast for the theologian to digest. Yet Colossians also pulsates with a message that, despite the limits of the situation for which it was originally written, remains as relevant and significant as ever.

Written at the same time, Philemon is a short companion letter to Colossians. Often neglected, Philemon's impact is out of all proportion to its size. Twenty-five verses long, Philemon was one of the key biblical texts that guided the church in its struggle for the abolition of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the West. Paul's rhetorical skill, as well as his heart, are clearly on display here as he seeks reconciliation between Philemon and his runaway slave Onesimus. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2289–2292; 2353–2354; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Placing Colossians and Philemon in the Larger Story

In the beginning, the Creator-King appointed humanity to be his image-bearers, to establish the earth as the realm of the kingdom of God. Heaven

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

and earth would intersect, and God would dwell among a flourishing human community. The will of God would be done on earth as it was in heaven. But humanity rebelled against their King and plunged the world into sin and death. Yet God's original intention for humanity was not to be thwarted. He called Abraham and promised that from this family all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). From Abraham descended the nation Israel, which was to carry this blessing to the nations. But the Old Testament story is largely of Israel's failure to accomplish this vocation. In the fullness of time, however, God sent Jesus, Israel's ultimate king ("Messiah"), who, having dealt with humanity's sin forever at his cross and resurrection, took up Israel's stalled mission. In him, the redeemed people of God—comprised now of Jew and Gentile—take up this vocation of Old Testament Israel, bringing the good news of God's reign in Christ to the nations. (Paul's letters to the Colossians and to Philemon fit here.) At the end of history, Jesus will return as the world's King to consummate God's original intention for creation and to establish the kingdom of God fully upon the earth in the new creation. Then God will finally and fully dwell among his people forever.

Key Verse

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

Date and Historical Background

Paul probably wrote his letters to the Colossians and to Philemon while imprisoned in Rome, about AD 61 (although an imprisonment in Ephesus in the mid-50s must remain a possibility). The apostle had already completed the three missionary journeys recorded in the book of Acts (ca. AD 46–57; see 13:1–21:16). After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and two years of imprisonment in Caesarea, a centurion guard escorted Paul by ship to Rome (Acts 21:27–27:1). After a hazardous journey, he arrived there in the spring of AD 60 (Acts 27:2–28:16). Here he lived under house arrest, although he was able to receive guests (Acts 28:17–31). This first Roman imprisonment lasted at least two years (AD 60–62; Acts 28:30). During this time, he wrote not only Colossians and Philemon but also the letters to the Ephesians and the Philippians. Timothy possibly served as his amanuensis (writing secretary) while Paul dictated the letters (Col. 1:1; 4:18; Philem. 1). Tychicus carried the letters from Rome to Colossae as the apostle's delegate (Col. 4:7–8).

Outline

Colossians

- I. Paul's Greeting of and Thanksgiving for the Colossians (1:1–8)
 - A. Paul Greets the Colossian Church (1:1–2)
 - B. Paul Thanks God for the Colossians' Faith and Love (1:3–8)
- II. Paul's Prayer for the Colossians (1:9–14)
 - A. Paul Prays That God May Fill the Colossians with Knowledge of His Will (1:9)
 - B. The Goal of Paul's Prayer: Lives Fully Pleasing to God (1:10a)
 - C. Attainment of the Goal: The Four Ways to a Life Fully Pleasing to God (1:10b–12a)
 - D. Reasons to Live a Life Fully Pleasing to God (1:12b–14)
- III. The Christ-Hymn and Its Application to the Colossians (1:15–23)
 - A. The Christ-Hymn: The Son's Preeminence over all Creation (1:15–17)
 - B. The Christ-Hymn: The Son's Preeminence over the New Creation (1:18–20)
 - C. The Christ-Hymn Applied: God Has Reconciled the Colossians to Christ (1:21–23)
- IV. Paul's Apostolic Ministry and Its Application to the Colossians (1:24–2:5)
 - A. Paul's Apostolic Suffering and Stewardship on Behalf of the Church (1:24–25)
 - B. The Mystery of Christ (1:26–27)
 - C. The Way Paul Fulfills His Apostolic Charge, and Its Goal (1:28–29)
 - D. Paul's Apostolic Labor on Behalf of the Colossian Church (2:1–3)
 - E. The Goal of Paul's Instruction: "Let No One Deceive You" (2:4–5)
- V. Paul Confronts the False Teaching (2:6–23)
 - A. "Walk in Him": Paul's Programmatic Statement (2:6–7)
 - B. "See to It That No One Takes You Captive": The Warning against the Heresy (2:8)
 - C. Fullness of Salvation in Christ: Four Reasons to Resist the Empty Heresy (2:9–15)
 - D. "Let No One Condemn You": Old Covenant Regulations and Visionary Experience (2:16–19)
 - E. Dead with Christ to Demonic Powers, the Fallen Age, and Man-Made Religion (2:20–23)
- VI. Exhortation: Seek Instead the Things of Christ Above (3:1–17)
 - A. Reshaping Reality: The Resurrected and Reigning Christ (3:1–4)
 - B. Strip Off the Fallen Old Humanity, with Its Vices (3:5–11)
 - C. Put On the New Humanity, with Its Virtues (3:12–17)
- VII. Instructions for Relationships both inside and outside the Faith (3:18–4:6)
 - A. Wives and Husbands (3:18–19)
 - B. Children and Parents (3:20–21)
 - C. Slaves and Masters (3:22–4:1)
 - D. Exhortation to Missional Prayer (4:2–4)
 - E. Walk Wisely to Attract Outsiders (4:5–6)
- VIII. The Letter's Conclusion: Greetings and Final Instructions (4:7–18)

Philemon

- I. Paul's Greeting of and Thanksgiving for Philemon (vv. 1–7)
 - A. Paul Greets Philemon (vv. 1–3)
 - B. Paul Thanks God for Philemon's Love and Faith (vv. 4–7)
- II. Paul's Appeal concerning Onesimus (vv. 8–25)
 - A. Paul Begins His Appeal concerning Onesimus (vv. 8–12)
 - B. Reason for the Appeal: Paul's Desire to Have Onesimus as a Personal Aide (vv. 13–14)
 - C. Introducing the New Onesimus: "Beloved Brother" Forever (vv. 15–16)
 - D. The Appeal Proper (vv. 17–20)
 - E. Encouragement to Follow Through on the Appeal (vv. 21–22)
 - F. The Letter's Conclusion: Greetings and Blessing (vv. 23–25)

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

As You Get Started

What is your present understanding of how Colossians and Philemon help us to grasp the whole storyline of the Bible?

What is your current understanding of how Colossians and Philemon contribute to Christian theology? How do these letters clarify our understanding of God, Christ, sin, and salvation?

What aspects of the message of Colossians or Philemon remain unclear for you? Are there any specific questions that you hope to have answered through this study?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment to ask God to bless you with increased understanding and a transformed heart as you begin this study of Colossians and Philemon.



THE BOOKS OF COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON complement each other as two New Testament texts that gloriously display the gospel and its implications for how God's people should live today.

This short guide will help readers see how both letters resonate with the apostle Paul's overriding passion: magnifying Jesus Christ as the supreme manifestation of God's redemptive purposes.

ABOUT THE *KNOWING THE BIBLE* SERIES

Over the course of 12 weeks, these studies explore books of the Bible and:

- Ask thoughtful questions to spur discussion
- Show how each passage unveils the gospel
- Tie the text in with the whole story of Scripture
- Illuminate the doctrines taught in each passage
- Invite you to discover practical implications
- Help you better understand and apply God's Word

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author, *According to Plan*

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BIBLE STUDY

