

# Handouts

## Including

### Notes and Questions



# Paul's Prison Letters

## Pity party or extraordinary focused witness?

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Your Notes

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### How do we act when bad things happen to us?

- ***We always have a choice***
- We can retaliate.
- We can throw a pity party.
- We can blame others.
- Or we can trust God no matter what and try to respond in a way He wants us to.
- ***In what are called the "Prison Epistles" Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon we'll look at how the Apostle Paul responded in a very difficult situation.***

### It's much more than a history lesson about Paul

- What we do, how we respond to challenging situations is the clearest evidence possible of what we truly believe and WHO we truly believe in.
- We can voice all sorts of positive things, affirm things that sound good—but how do we react in the realities of life?
- NOTHING outside us causes/forces us to act in a certain way; we respond based on what is already there.
- From bad language to bad actions,
- Difficult times give us a chance to see what is in our hearts and work on changes if necessary.

### Paul's situation

- He had spent 10 years since he had become a Christian constantly traveling, sharing Jesus, and starting churches.
- He worked with an often-changing team of fellow workers as we see in how he mentions them in these books.
- It was during these travels that the churches were founded that these letters were addressed to.
- After founding these and other churches, he wanted to go to Rome--remember our lesson on Romans that he wrote from Corinth.
- Paul went to Jerusalem first and things did not go as planned. He was arrested and that resulted in 2 years of imprisonment on his way to Rome.
- Once in Rome he was under house arrest (not actually a prison—that came later) where he was chained to a Roman guard for 2 more years, supported by friends and churches and this is when he wrote these letters.

### In this situation of unfair arrest, how did Paul respond?

- Overall and always—we can see he prayed—as his letters are filled with the prayers, plus the letters are filled with teaching and encouragements.
- You'd never think that they were written by someone in chains and captive— he never whines, complains, or blames other for the situation he is in, and he almost never even mentions his conditions or his legal situation or the things he suffered.
- ***He keeps his eye, his focus on his mission and his people.***
- Let's look at the individual letters to see how he does this.

### Pattern of much of Paul's writing

- **In his organization of content, first orthodoxy, then orthopraxy!**
- **Orthodoxy** is right thinking. **Orthopraxy** is right conduct.

- In Romans and in the Prison letters this pattern is most clear.
- First, we need to BELIEVE certain things, but based on that—
- ***We need to LIVE a certain way***
- We often emphasize believing the correct thing, but if we don't take action on it, we don't really believe it.
- Let's now look at the individual books—let's look at what he says with a constant eye on how we can apply it.

### **The book of Ephesians**

- Paul founded the church there and then spent 2 years there.
- *Acts 19: 8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*
- Things went well, until, motivated by the profits they were losing, those making a profit from the pagan temples, caused a great uproar— “Great is Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians” was their rallying cry—Paul leaves, and returned briefly on one of his last stops on the way to Jerusalem/Rome.
- Paul is not focused on any particular error in Ephesians.

### **Instead, Paul encourages a focus on the reality of...**

- The “heavenly realms” (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12)—we will look at some of these verses, which is so different than what most of us focus on which is what is in front of us, what is happening now.
- In contrast with his emphasis, what about the saying, often said in a derogatory fashion that people can be “so heavenly minded, they are no earthly good.”
- ***Ephesians counters with the idea in contrast, unless we are heavenly minded, we are no earthly good.***
- C.S. Lewis, said, “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”
- Paul would totally agree and then goes on to shift our focus with these words—

### **Our present and future in Christ, summarized by Paul in Eph. 1**

- *Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he [God] had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.*
- *<sup>7-10</sup> Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, . . . we're a free people—free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. Abundantly free! He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. . . . <sup>11-12</sup> It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for.*
- Living with that view, Paul could endure the anything because, as one writer said, once we get to heaven, they will all will be “like a night spent in a bad hotel.”

### With this reality, what we need to focus on

- Eph. 1:15 *For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*
- We need to consider, think about, focus on...
- The hope to which we've been called, (which is) the glorious inheritance we have—an incredible eternity with our Savior.
- And the power He gives us to live now.

### Part of that power for living now is in Eph 6

- The "Armor of God"
- *<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*
- *<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

### A few comments on it (much more online, written, etc.)

- **"We wrestle not against flesh and blood."** Remember you are involved in spiritual warfare and the enemy never takes time off—but neither does your God.
- **"Stand your ground"** often that is the most important thing you can do—simply stand firm—so often in the Bible people were told to "stand still and see the salvation of God."
- **"Belt of truth and breastplate of righteousness"** never, ever, ever a reason to not be truthful or to act unrighteously as far as is possible.

### More on our spiritual armor

- ***Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.***
- A great picture, because those with faith must trust in what we cannot see and that is our shield against the very tangible arrows of the enemy.
- <sup>17</sup> . . . ***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God***—the Bible is our one weapon to attack—we've got to learn to use it well.

### Colossians

- The church in Colossae was founded by Epaphras, a fellow worker of Paul's.
- He reported problems in the church (as evidenced by the various topics

discussed that people were getting side-tracked by legalism, rituals, worship of angels—adding unnecessary things over and above Jesus to their faith).

- The theme of Colossians is the complete adequacy of Christ, as contrasted with the emptiness of the other things that distracted them.

### **The book is one of the clearest statements that Jesus was God in human form**

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- *Col. 1: 15 **The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.** <sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*
- Much of the book deals with false beliefs that made Jesus less than what He is— and we can't ever allow that in our lives. Based on that, he prays...

### **Paul's prayer for them**

- *Col. 1:9-11 We do not cease to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of his will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may conduct yourselves worthily of the Lord, and in such a way as to be altogether pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the fuller knowledge of God. May you continue to be strengthened with all strength according to his glorious power, so that you may possess all fortitude and patience with joy.*
- Wm. Barclays comments on this passage:
- *Prayer begins by asking that we may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of the will of God. . . **We are trying not so much to make God listen to us as to make ourselves listen to him; we are trying not to persuade God to do what we want, but to find out what he wants us to do.***
- *It so often happens that in prayer we are really saying, "Thy will be changed," when we ought to be saying, "Thy will be done." The first object of prayer is not so much to speak to God as to listen to him.*

### **Barclay continues....**

- *When Paul prays that his friends may have wisdom and understanding, he is praying that they may understand the great truths of Christianity and may be able to apply them to the tasks and decisions which meet them in everyday living. A man may quite easily be a master of theology and a failure in living; able to write and talk about the eternal truths and yet helpless to apply them to the things which meet him every day. **The Christian must know what Christianity means, not in a vacuum but in the business of living.***
- *This knowledge of God's will, and this wisdom and understanding, must issue in right conduct. . . .There is nothing in this world so practical as prayer. It is not escape from reality. Prayer and action go hand in hand.*

*We pray not in order to escape life but in order to be better able to meet it.*

#### **Paul ends the book with an encouragement to pray**

- *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. (Colossians 4:2-4)*
- Be “watchful and thankful”—don’t let life just happen.....
- **Note his prayer request—**
- Not for ease or freedom, but for success in the ministry God has called him to\*\*\***IN the situation he is in**\*\*\*
- Again, no matter where we are, emotionally, financially, workwise\*\*there will NEVER be a good time to follow God or do what we want, need to do\*\*We simply need to do it anyway.

#### **Book of Philemon**

- Paul wrote this short letter (see vv. 1, 9, 19) probably at the same time as Colossians and sent it to Colossae with the same travelers, Onesimus and Tychicus.
- The letter is addressed to Philemon, a believer in Colossae who, along with others, was a slave owner.
- One of his slaves, Onesimus, had apparently stolen from him (cf. v. 18) and then run away, which under Roman law was punishable by death. But Onesimus met Paul and through his ministry became a Christian (see v. 10). Now he was willing to return to his master, and Paul writes this personal appeal to ask that he be accepted as a Christian brother (see v. 16).

#### **His prayer for Philemon**

- *"I pray that you may be active in sharing your **faith**, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints." - (Philemon 5-7)*
- Interesting that in sharing our faith, we see what we really have in Christ
- This happens because evangelism (sharing the “good news”) changes us as much as it changes others—share you are, what is important to you.
- We sometimes don’t fully understand what we have until we explain it to someone else or –
- Get serious about living it until we take it seriously that we are a witness, an ambassador, a representative of Jesus.

#### **Philippians (notes from the NIV Bible)**

- The church at Philippi had a special significance for Paul--it was the first church he founded in Europe (see Acts 16:6-40).
- The first convert was Lydia, a seller of purple cloth, and women continued to have a prominent role in the Philippian church (e.g., Phil. 4:2).
- He was briefly incarcerated in Philippi (Acts 16:23-40)—Paul and Silas were beaten, put in stocks, in prison and how do they respond?
- They SING—God intervenes, panic, the salvation of the guard follows.
- Paul visited Philippi a few times after his initial departure, and the church maintained active support for his ministry (Phil. 4:15-16).

#### **Reasons for writing the book**

- Paul’s primary purpose in writing this letter was to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him upon learning of his detention at Rome (1:5; 4:10-19).

- In the Roman prisons you were dependent in large measure on the gifts of friends and family.
- ***As people are today—be aware of this—more than spiritual help needed today for those in prison!***
- Paul wrote to thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent him and to encourage them to stand firm and walk worthy in the face of persecution and to rejoice—regardless of circumstances.
- The book also contains one of the most profound Christological passages in the NT (2:5–11). “Kenosis passage” “emptying....

#### **His prayers for this special group of people**

- *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,<sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Phil 1:9-11*
- Similar to the previous themes of keeping in mind what is coming—the Day of Christ—when we meet Him.
- And so for love based on “knowledge and depth of insight.”
- Our love for God and actions towards others should go beyond emotional responses—what do people really need?
- “A depth of insight” in how we love others is rare and invaluable—understand people’s “Love Language.”

#### **Here is the passage Phil. 2:5-11**

- <sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- <sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
- <sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- <sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### **Definition of Kenosis:**

- **The relinquishment of divine attributes by Jesus Christ in becoming human. ... From the Greek word, kenōsis, meaning the action of emptying”**
- ***It has been applied to the idea of Jesus setting aside his divine attributes (in ways and to what extent we don’t comprehend when he came to earth.***
- Yet even here Paul’s purpose is not to teach theology alone, but to call the church to unity on the basis of the humility and servanthood of Jesus Christ. (this comment from NIV Study Bible notes)
- Application: ***you are never such a big deal or deserving or whatever to not be a servant—Jesus who is our Creator and Savior emptied himself***

*for others and we ought to be willing to do the same.*

**But we aren't required to do all that is required of us alone—Jesus is there to help us**

- *"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that **he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**" –*
- **"will carry it on to completion" or more correctly "Will perfect'** from the Greek: **epiteleo** from **epi** = intensify meaning of following verb + **teleo** = make an end and bring something to its destined goal) conveys the sense that God will carry the work out to the finish. God will not begin with us and then abandon us. He will finish the **work** He has begun in us and will bring it to its intended goal, when we shall be like Him (1 Jn 3:2-note from Precept Austin)
- **Related to this passage, Spurgeon** said, "The life of a Christian is a series of miracles."
- **Spurgeon** was also once asked by another minister "whether he believed in the final perseverance of the saints. "Well," said he, "I do not know much about that, but I firmly believe in the final perseverance of God, that where he has begun a good work he will carry it on until it is complete."

**Then he tells them how to pray, because our eternal outcome is never in doubt**

- ***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - (Phil. 4:6-7)***
- He then goes on to share his example of not being anxious: *Phil. 4:<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (NOTE THE CONTEXT of this verse)*

**Phil 4:13**

- I must comment on this passage because it contains one of the most misused verses in the Bible--
- ***"I can do all things through Christ." Phil. 4:13***
- Somehow twisted into "I can do whatever I want to do" if I give a token acknowledgement to God.
- Paul couldn't when he wrote this. He was chained to a Roman guard, imprisoned, but what he could do—
- Is he could handle every circumstance God gave him—
- Abased, abounding, whatever\*\*\*circumstances never a deterrent for doing God's will.

**Other translations of Phil. 4:13**

- *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. KJV*—in some ways a misleading translation
- Others, based on older, better manuscripts:
- *For all things I have strength, in Christ's strengthening me; Youngs*



- *In general and in particular I have learned the secret of facing either poverty or plenty. I am ready for anything through the strength of the one who lives within me.* Phillips
- *Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.* **Message**
- **In summary, the truth and promise of the verse is not that we can do whatever we want because of a magic connection with Jesus, but that we can get through anything because of the Lord's help.**

**The true meaning of**

**Phil. 4:13 is a good summary of these books**

- As the Message translation puts it: *Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.*
- Paul not only endured the difficult situations, but he made the most of them, he actively taught, shared the message of Jesus no matter what situation he was in.
- A very practical application is that when you find yourself in a challenging or lonely situation—regardless of your feelings, DO SOMETHING for others for the sake of Jesus.
- ***And when you do that, when you focus on the next world, and your extraordinary future in Jesus you can be effective, productive, at peace and joyful in this one.***