

## Philippians and Colossians Ep 223



In this outline are a few links to some of my favorite books that have really helped me understand the context and content of the scriptures. [Click here to see all of my favorite books on Amazon](#). As an Amazon Affiliate, I do earn a small commission from qualifying purchases (at no extra cost to you).

### Philippians – Introduction

In the letter to the Philippians, Paul expresses his gratitude to the church for their support and partnership in his ministry. However, being in prison, most likely in Rome according to scholars, Paul also takes the opportunity to address other important matters. He anticipates the likelihood of future persecution that the church will face and encourages them to stand strong together. Despite their deep affection for Paul, the members of the Philippian church, which likely consisted of multiple house churches, were experiencing internal divisions. Therefore, Paul emphasizes the importance of unity and mutual service among them. These exhortations were common in the ancient world, but in this case, they indicate genuine divisions within the community. Some of these divisions may stem from a disagreement between two of Paul's fellow workers who may have been leading separate house churches (See Philippians 4.2-3). Additionally, if Paul's references are accurate, there may also be opposition from Jewish Christians advocating for circumcision.

### Philippi – The Location



The city of Philippi bears the name of Philip II, king of Macedonia, who founded it in 356 B.C. There had previously been on the site a Thracian village known by its Greek name Krenides (“springs”). The place was taken over in 361 B.C. by settlers from the island of Thasos led by an Athenian exile named Callistratus. The main attractiveness of the place lay in its proximity to the gold mines of Mount Pangaeus, which Philip made sure of controlling by means of his new foundation. It was also strategically important because it commanded the land route to the Hellespont (Dardanelles) and Bosphorus, and so across into Asia.<sup>1</sup>

### Paul’s Imprisonment

It is evident that Philippians was written while Paul was in prison and awaiting a judgment that would affect his liberty and perhaps his life. Three times in the first chapter he mentions his imprisonment and integrates it into the course of his apostolic ministry: he claims to be stationed where he is “for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:16). Through his imprisonment, indeed, the gospel was being promoted in quarters to which it might not otherwise have found access.

<sup>1</sup> F.F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Baker Publishing Group, 1989.

But where was this imprisonment? Paul does not say explicitly. His Philippian friends did not need to be told. They knew where he was: they had lately sent Epaphroditus, one of their number, to visit him (2:25). The traditional answer to the question has been Rome; but in more recent times both Ephesus and Caesarea have been suggested.

The claims of Ephesus have been defended by A. Deissmann, G. S. Duncan, and others.<sup>2</sup> It is quite probable that Paul was imprisoned at least once during his residence in Ephesus (A.D. 52–55), but the imprisonment that he was undergoing when he sent this letter to Philippi can scarcely have been an Ephesian imprisonment. When he says that “it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ” (1:13), the Greek word translated “palace guard” is *praitōrion*, a borrowing from Latin *praetorium*. His use of a loanword suggests that it bears its technical sense. The word denotes the headquarters of a praetor, more particularly the commanding officer’s headquarters in a military camp. In the city of Rome under the empire it meant the praetorian guard, the emperor’s personal bodyguard. Farther afield it was used for the headquarters of a provincial governor, but of the governor of an imperial province, who had military units under his command. There is no known instance in imperial times of its use for the headquarters of a proconsul, the governor of a senatorial province such as Asia was at this time.

Appeal has been made to inscriptional evidence for the presence of a *praetorianus* (member of the praetorian guard) in the vicinity of Ephesus, but this evidence is irrelevant for the matter under discussion. The *praetorianus* mentioned in three Latin inscriptions was a former member of the praetorian guard who later discharged police duties as a *stationarius* on a Roman road in the province of Asia.

If Ephesus is ruled out as the place from which the letter was sent, Caesarea comes up for consideration. Its claims have been ably defended by a number of scholars, most notably Ernst Lohmeyer.<sup>3</sup> In favor of Caesarea is the express statement of Acts 23:35 that Paul was kept under guard there “in Herod’s palace” (lit., *praetorium*). This was an official building set up by Herod the Great on the artificial acropolis that he had constructed for his new city of Caesarea between 22 and 12 B.C.; it appears to have served now as headquarters for the Roman procurator of Judaea. Since the procurator had auxiliary cohorts under his command, his headquarters could properly be designated the praetorium.<sup>4</sup>

## Outline

### I. Introduction

#### A. Greeting and expression of gratitude (Philippians 1:1-11)

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Deissmann, “Zur ephesinischen Gefangenschaft des Apostels Paulus,” in *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir W. M. Ramsay*, ed. W. H. Buckler and W. M. Calder, pp. 121–27; P. Feine, *Die Abfassung des Philipperbriefes in Ephesus*; W. Michaelis, *Die Gefangenschaft des Paulus in Ephesus; Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper*, J. H. Michael, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*; George Simpson Duncan, *St. Paul’s Ephesian Ministry*; “A New Setting for Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians,” *ExpT* 43 (1931–32), pp. 7–11; “Were Paul’s Imprisonment Epistles Written from Ephesus?” *ExpT* 67 (1955–56), pp. 163–66; “Paul’s Ministry in Asia—The Last Phase,” *NTS* 3 (1956–57), pp. 211–18

<sup>3</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper*, pp. 3f., 38–49; also L. Johnson, “The Pauline Letters from Caesarea,” *ExpT* 68 (1956–57), pp. 24–26; J. J. Gunther, *Paul: Messenger and Exile*, pp. 98–107; John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 60f., 77–79

<sup>4</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Philippians*.

“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1.1).

This letter, considered an authentic letter of Paul, mentions “bishops” or overseers (ἐπισκόποις – dative plural). This is an argument against those proponents of there not being bishops in the first century in early Christianity.

The question of whether bishops existed in the first century CE is a subject of ongoing scholarly debate. Some proponents argue that the early Christian church did not have bishops during this period, pointing to the lack of explicit evidence for the existence of a monarchical episcopate. They contend that the hierarchical structure of overseers developed gradually over time and that the terms used in early Christian writings, such as "episkopos" and "presbyteros," were used interchangeably to refer to various forms of leadership or oversight.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, they emphasize the diversity and fluidity of early Christian communities, suggesting that a centralized episcopal structure did not emerge until the second century. However, it is important to acknowledge that this view is not universally accepted among scholars, and alternative interpretations exist based on differing analyses of the available historical sources.

B. Paul's current situation and outlook (Philippians 1:12-26)

“So then my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places” (Philippians 1.13).

ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου φανεροὺς ἐν Χριστῷ γενέσθαι ἐν ὄλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πάσιν.

Some commentators have suggested that “palace” or “praetorium” here may refer to a provincial governor’s residence, such as the place of Paul’s detention in Caesarea (Acts 23:35); Paul was often detained (2 Cor 11:23), and a detention in Asia or in Syria-Palestine would clarify the presence of so many helpers in Colossians 4:10-15. Others, taking “Caesar’s household”

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<sup>5</sup> The argument that the early Christian church did not have overseers or bishops until the second century is associated with a group of scholars commonly referred to as the "Bauer thesis" or "Bauer hypothesis." This view was popularized by Walter Bauer, a German theologian and scholar, in his influential work "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity" (German: "[Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum](#)"), first published in 1934. According to Bauer, early Christianity was diverse and comprised various competing Christianities, each with its own beliefs and practices. He argued that what eventually became orthodox Christianity emerged as the dominant form only in the second century, suppressing other forms of Christianity that held differing beliefs. Bauer claimed that the rise of a monarchical bishop or overseer, representing a centralized authority, was a later development and not present in the earliest stages of Christianity. Bauer's work challenged the traditional view that the apostles appointed bishops to succeed them in their respective regions. He argued that evidence from early Christian texts suggested a more fluid and diverse structure of leadership, with a lack of centralized authority or a uniform system of oversight. We see this in much of Paul’s writing, where he continually refers to “house churches.” For example, Romans 16.3-5: Paul mentions Priscilla and Aquila, stating that the church meets in their house: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house." Also, in 1 Corinthians 16.19: Paul writes to the Corinthians, referring to Aquila and Priscilla again: "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house." Colossians 4.15: Paul mentions another house church: "Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house." These statements go against the idea that there was a hierarchal situation with bishops or overseers in various cities in the Roman empire that were running the church. As a Latter-day Saint, this makes sense, as the apostles were still probably around during Paul’s writing of this letter.

(4:22) literally, think that “praetorium” here refers to detention in Rome by the “praetorian guard” (nasb), as in Acts 28:16.<sup>6</sup>

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death (Philippians 1.20).

Despite enduring multiple beatings and stonings, one might expect Paul to adopt a more cautious approach in his teachings and display a conciliatory tone. Perhaps he would temper his message if he anticipated further suffering. However, what makes Paul's spirit remarkable is his unwavering commitment. The pain he had experienced thus far, his current imprisonment, or even the looming threat of death did not deter him. Despite everything, Paul remained resolute, boldly proclaiming Christ with the same fervor as his earlier days.

## II. Exhortations to Unity and Humility

### A. Encouragement to unity and selflessness (Philippians 1:27-2:4)

27 Only worthily of the good news of the Christ conduct ye yourselves, that, whether having come and seen you, whether being absent I may hear of the things concerning you, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one soul, striving together for the faith of the good news, 28 and not terrified in anything by those opposing, which to them indeed is a token of destruction, and to you of salvation, and that from God (Philippians 1.27-28 YLT).

The confidence that Paul suggests here alludes to the Old Testament and Jewish hope that God would destroy his people's enemies in the end time but vindicate and save his people. See for example: [Wisdom of Solomon 5:1-2](#); [Baruch 4:24-25](#).

### B. The example of Christ's humility (Philippians 2:5-11)

#### Catabasis in Philippians

A great example of **catabasis** in the New Testament comes to us from the writings of Paul. Paul used this form to illustrate the redemptive power of [Jesus Christ](#) as Savior and Redeemer. Paul first shows us that Jesus is equal with God the Father, and then step by step downward shows us that Jesus became human, going down in the depths of humility so far as to suffer a humiliating death “as a man” on the cruel cross of Calvary:

Who, being in the form of God,

thought it not robbery to be equal with God;

But made himself of no reputation,

and took upon him the form of a servant,

and was made in the likeness of men:

And being found in fashion as a man,

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<sup>6</sup> Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Background Commentary: New Testament](#), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 558.

he humbled himself,  
 and became obedient unto death,  
 even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:6-8).

This tells us that Jesus descended, and, according to JFS, he experienced all that we experience.

ἀλλ' ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν "Rather, he emptied himself" (Philippians 2.7). The KJV reads "But made himself of no reputation."

The New Testament scholar M. R. Vincent, in his *New Testament Word Studies...* explained the significance of verse 7, in which Paul used a phrase from the Greek that is translated "made himself of no reputation." Again Vincent indicated that this Greek phrase literally means "emptied Himself." Vincent then added: "The general sense is that He divested Himself of that peculiar mode of existence which was proper and peculiar to Him as one with God. He laid aside the form of God. In so doing, He did not divest Himself of His divine nature. The change was a change of state: the form of a servant for the form of God...In short, Paul reminded us that though Christ had incomprehensible stature, majesty, power and position in the premortal existence, he... allowed himself to be taken from that high and holy position and placed into the body of a man with all of its consequent weaknesses and limitations. This concept deserves examination in more detail. If we are to more fully comprehend the idea of God's condescension, we must first understand who he was before coming to the earth. As we look at Christ as the Creator, we are told in latter-day revelation that the extent of his creations is so vast that they cannot be numbered unto man (Moses 1:33, 35, 37)...Now we begin to sense the incredible scope of the condescension of Christ in leaving that position, that majesty, that power, and taking upon himself mortality-becoming an infant totally dependent on others, requiring daily nourishment, being subject to the weaknesses of the flesh, feeling pain when he slipped in the carpenter's shop and hit his finger, being vulnerable to suffering and sickness. Imagine the God of the universe being subject to the common cold! But, as Paul said, Christ thought it not robbery that he should leave that position, but rather, he emptied himself of that glorious power and took upon himself all that mortality implies. That is one sense of the condescension of God."<sup>7</sup>

Every knee should bow... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2.10-11).

Every person in the world at some point in his eternal progression is one day going to have to come to the moment of truth when he must answer the question, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matt. 22:42). Think of that. At one point in our eternal progression, each one of us is going to have to answer the question, Who is Jesus Christ? We are told that every eye shall see, every ear shall hear, and every knee shall bow, every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (see Philip. 2:10-11; D&C 88:104; 3 Ne. 17:16); "When all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God" (Mosiah 27:31; see also Rom. 14:11 and D&C 76:110).<sup>8</sup>

### Christology of Philippians 2.6-11

<sup>7</sup> *Selected Writings of Gerald N. Lund: Gospel Scholars Series*, Deseret Book, 1999, p. 162.

<sup>8</sup> Elder Robert D. Hales, "[What Think Ye of Christ?](#)" *New Era*, Apr. 1987.

The text of Philippians 2.6-11 is considered some of the earliest Christian writing, probably textualized around the mid 50's A.D., right around the time Q was written, as well as the genuine Pauline epistles. This therefore shows us that early Christians did have what we call a "High Christology" – how they viewed Jesus... he wasn't just a man who was "adopted" as God's son, what some would call a lower Christology, or an adoptionist view. In my view, the Christology of Philippians does not match that of John or Colossians, but it is still a "high" Christology. This was probably an early Christian hymn, and what scholars call "an early window into the belief and liturgical practices of early Christians."<sup>9</sup>

C. Working out salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-18)

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2.12b).

Elder Oaks taught:

Are Latter-day Saints susceptible to such heresies? The Apostle Paul wrote that we should "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philip. 2:12.) Could that familiar expression mean that the sum total of our own righteousness will win us salvation and exaltation? Could some of us believe that our heavenly parentage and our divine destiny allow us to pass through mortality and attain eternal life solely on our own merits?

On the basis of what I have heard, I believe that some of us, some of the time, say things that can create that impression. We can forget that keeping the commandments, which is necessary, is not sufficient. As Nephi said, we must labor diligently to persuade everyone "to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do." (2 Ne. 25:23.)

In his famous poem "Invictus," William Ernest Henley hurled man's challenge against Fate. With head "bloody, but unbowed," determined man is unconquerable. The last verse reads:

*It matters not how strait the gate,*

*How charged with punishments the scroll,*

*I am the master of my fate.*

*I am the captain of my soul.*<sup>10</sup>

...Man unquestionably has impressive powers and can bring to pass great things by tireless efforts and indomitable will. But after all our obedience and good works, we cannot be saved from the effect of our sins without the grace extended by the atonement of Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me (Philippians 2.17-18).

Israel had drink offerings (e.g., Lev 23:18, 37), and other ancient religions also regularly poured out libations to the gods, usually wine but sometimes water or another substance. Gentiles also

<sup>9</sup> R.P. Martin, [\*Carmen Christi: Philippians 2.5-11 in recent interpretation and in the setting of Early Christian Worship\*](#), 1967, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>10</sup> [\*Out of the Best Books\*](#), 5 vols., ed. Bruce B. Clark and Robert K. Thomas, Deseret Book, 1968, 4:93.

<sup>11</sup> Elder Oaks, "[What Think Ye of Christ?](#)" *Ensign*, Nov. 1988.

poured libations at the beginning of banquets and could pour them in memory of person who had died. Paul is being poured out (cf. 2:7) as such a “drink offering” to the true God, a willing offering on their behalf that joined their own sacrifice.<sup>12</sup>

### III. Paul's Plans and Commendations

A. Announcement of Timothy's visit (Philippians 2:19-24)

B. Commendation of Epaphroditus and his return to the Philippians (Philippians 2:25-30)

### IV. Warning Against Legalism and Confidence in the Flesh

A. Warning against the influence of Judaizers (Philippians 3:1-3)

Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3.2-3).

The threefold repetition of “beware” is rhetorical *anaphora*, opening repetition to highlight a point. The opponents here are not Jewish persecutors, who would be unlikely in Philippi, which apparently had a very small Jewish community (cf. Acts 16:13). Rather, they are like the traveling Jewish Christian teachers Paul had encountered in Galatia who want to circumcise Gentiles. Scholars debate whether they have already visited Philippi or are simply traveling about; if the latter, Paul is warning that they may come there. “Dog” was a familiar insult, sometimes implying dogs’ vulgar public sexual, excretory or (cf. 3:8, 19) dietary habits. Cynic philosophers were regularly called “dogs,” but given the specific error Paul refutes in this passage, he clearly does not use it as a reference to these philosophers; that use merely illustrates to what a great extent the term was one of disdain. Philosophers called those ruled by passions “beasts.” Probably more to the point, Jewish teaching considered dogs unclean and sometimes sexually immoral; the Old Testament might apply the title to male cult prostitutes (Deut 23:17); especially to enemies in Psalm 22:16. Such a title would certainly make the pietists who were demanding circumcision recoil. There were “beware of dog” signs even in ancient Rome, where they were pets and watchdogs (Petronius, *Satyricon* 29), no doubt reinforcing the biting sarcasm of Paul’s phrase. Here Paul uses another word for “circumcision” (nasb), which means “mutilation” (niv, nrsv; cf. the lxx of 1 Kings 18:28); Plays on words were common; cf. mutilation (*katatome*) here and circumcision (*peritome*) in 3:3.<sup>13</sup>

B. Paul's perspective on righteousness through faith (Philippians 3:4-9)

C. Striving toward the goal of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:10-14)

11 If anyhow I may attain to the rising again of the dead. 12 Not that I did already obtain, or have been already perfected; but I pursue, if also I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by the Christ Jesus; 13 brethren, I do not reckon myself to have laid hold; and one thing -- the things behind indeed forgetting, and to the things before stretching forth - 14 to the mark I pursue for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3.11-14 YLT)

<sup>12</sup> Keener, [Background](#), p. 561.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 562-563.

In the language of athletic competition—often used metaphorically by ancient moralists (e.g., Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.17.29; Diogenes *Laertius* 6.2.34) and Greek-speaking Jews (e.g., *Testament of Job* 4:10; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.217-18)—Paul describes his striving for the future hope of 3:11. Greco-Roman sages generally admitted that they were not yet “perfect” (in contrast to the ideal sage) but were making progress. Nevertheless they sometimes spoke of themselves as the “mature,” the wise, as opposed to those who were still novices. (Older commentators note that the mystery cults described the highest stage of initiation as “perfection” or “completion,” but this is probably less relevant here than the language of sages.) “What is behind” (niv) belongs to Paul’s image of the race; to win, one must keep one’s eyes on the finish line; Greek runners often ran in a straight line and back.<sup>14</sup>

Οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον “Not as though I had already attained” (Philippians 3.12).

“Press toward the mark (Philip. 3.14). Many modern Christians claim to be saved, through the pure grace of Christ and by witness of the Spirit, before they have necessarily demonstrated their complete faithfulness. Yet as Paul indicates, to achieve salvation, even with the indispensable aid of Christ, is not easy or instantaneous. One must work at it, even ‘with fear and trembling.’ (Philip. 2:12.) Even near the end of his dedicated life, Paul himself announced that he had not attained perfection. He was still reaching, still pressing toward the mark for ‘the prize’ of eternal life. (Philip. 3:12-14.) Regardless of how well the Philippian saints were living, Paul counseled them to do better.”<sup>15</sup>

## V. Exhortations to Rejoice and Stand Firm

### A. Call to rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 3:15-4:1)

Συμμιμηταί μου γίνεσθε ἀδελφοί “Brothers, together become imitators of me!” (Philippians 3.17a).

Teachers like Paul would attain the resurrection of the righteous by placing their trust solely in Christ for their righteousness (3:9-11). On the contrary, his opponents, likened to dogs attracted to filth (3:2, 8), were destined for destruction, along with those who followed their ways (3:18-19). It was common for disciples to learn through imitation of their teachers, as examples played a crucial role in the learning process. Paul had previously provided four instances, including himself, as illustrations in chapter 2, and once again referred to himself in 3:4-14.

### B. Exhortation to stand firm in the Lord (Philippians 4:2-9)

So then, my brethren, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand ye in the Lord, beloved. 2 Euodia I exhort, and Syntyche I exhort, to be of the same mind in the Lord; 3 and I ask also thee, genuine yoke-fellow, be assisting those women who in the good news did strive along with me, with Clement also, and the others, my fellow-workers, whose names [are] in the book of life (Philippians 4.1-3).

The audience hear Euodia and Syntyche, the two divided women members of the community whom the “genuine yokemate” is to bring together (4:2–3b), further described as “those who in the gospel have struggled together with me” (4:3c)... The resolution of the differences separating

<sup>14</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 564.

<sup>15</sup> J. Lewis Taylor, "[New Testament Backgrounds: Philippians](#)," *Ensign*, Mar. 1976.



Euodia and Syntyche is important both for the sake of the unity of the community and of the fellowship they share with one another and with Paul for advancing the gospel. That it was in the work of advancing the “gospel” (εὐαγγελίῳ) that these two women “struggled together” (συνήθλησάν) with Paul further commends the worthiness of the resolution of their differences as a priority not only for the “genuine yokemate,” who is to bring them together, but for the audience as a whole, whom Paul expects similarly to be “with one mind struggling together (συναθλοῦντες) for the faith of the gospel (εὐαγγελίου)” (1:27)... Euodia and Syntyche have “struggled together” (συνήθλησάν) in the gospel (4:3c) not only with Paul but with Clement, a named and apparently prominent member of the audience, as well as with the rest (cf. 1:13) of Paul’s “co-workers” (συνεργῶν).<sup>16</sup>

Clement may be the author of 1 Clement, a late-first-century Christian letter from Rome to Corinth, as tradition suggests, although Clement is a common Roman name. The “book of life” is an Old Testament image further developed in ancient Judaism (e.g., Ex 32:32-33; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:16; the Essene CD 20.19; *Jubilees* 36:10).<sup>17</sup>

μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε “In no way be anxious” (Philippians 4.6a, my translation). The KJV reads “Be careful for nothing.”

Paul learned to rely on the Lord through his challenges. Like Paul, I needed to be willing to place my burdens on the Lord. He loves us and wants to help us. He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). When we hand our fears and frustrations to Him, He will help us emotionally and spiritually. “I will not leave you comfortless,” the Savior said. “I will come to you” (John 14:18).<sup>18</sup>

### Article of Faith #13 comes from Paul

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4.8)

#### C. Gratitude for the Philippians' support and contentment in all circumstances (Philippians 4:10-20)

Paul avoids a direct “thank you” in this section (which could portray him as a dependent on the church’s benefaction) while expressing his appreciation. Paul acknowledges their gift graciously, without sounding as if he is requesting more. (Gratitude may have been particularly valued in Macedonia, of which Philippi was a part; in earlier times an ungrateful man was said to have been liable to prosecution there—Seneca, *On Benefits* 3.6.2.) In the ancient world, patrons showed hospitality to and looked out for their clients; if Paul had said “thank you” forthrightly, he might have cast himself in the role of a subordinate, dependent client.<sup>19</sup>]

<sup>16</sup> John Paul Heil, *Philippians: Let Us Rejoice in Being Conformed in Christ*, Society of Biblical Literature, 2010, p. 147-148.

<sup>17</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 565.

<sup>18</sup> Eric Murdock, “Facing Anxiety,” *Ensign*, April 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 566.

And I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye flourished again in caring for me, for which also ye were caring, and lacked opportunity (Philippians 4.10 YLT).

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Philippians 4.13).

Sister Okazaki taught:

We do not know the challenges and adversities that life will give us. But the scriptures promise us that "with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37), and we can say with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philip. 4:13).

The scriptures are filled with testimonies of the strength that comes from the Savior. I always feel a lift of the heart that comes to me when I read these rejoicings of the prophets:

Moses exulted, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (Ex. 15:2).

David sang, "God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect" (2 Sam. 22:33).

To Isaiah, the Lord promised, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10).

How can we build this kind of faith in the strength of the Savior? David had counsel for the people of his time that I repeat to you: "Seek the Lord and his strength ... continually" (1 Chr. 16:11). "Blessed is the man [or woman] whose strength is in thee. ... Go from strength to strength" (Ps. 84:5, 7).

Sisters, strengthen yourselves by seeking the source of true strength—the Savior. Come unto him. He loves you. He desires your happiness and exults in your desires for righteousness. Make him your strength, your daily companion, your rod and your staff. Let him comfort you. There is no burden we need bear alone. His grace compensates for our deficiencies.<sup>20</sup>

But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God (Philippians 4.18).

"I have received" was very common, perhaps the most common standard phrase, in receipts; Paul acknowledges their gift in regular business terms. But he also uses Old Testament language for a sacrifice ("sweetsmelling," GNT; "acceptable"; sacrificial language was sometimes applied figuratively); in being partners with this missionary, they are partners with the God who sent him.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. Final Greetings and Benediction

A. Personal greetings and commendations (Philippians 4:21-23)

"Caesar's household" (Philippians 4.22)

The "household of Caesar" could refer to anyone in the Roman civil service directly dependent on Caesar, including all his slaves and freedmen; it always indicated great prestige. It most likely

<sup>20</sup> Chieko N. Okazaki, "[Strength in the Savior](#)," *Ensign*, Nov. 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 566.

refers here to the Praetorian Guard; if Paul was in Rome at this point, anyone who guarded him (Acts 28:16, 30) would naturally be exposed to his teaching. Even Caesar's slaves wielded more power and prestige than most well-off free persons; the Praetorian Guard itself held the prestige of the Roman military's elite, often rewarded by Caesar himself. Paul's greeting would impress his readers: his imprisonment has indeed advanced the gospel (1:12-13).<sup>22</sup>

## B. Benediction and closing remarks (Philippians 4:23)

### Colossians – Introduction

Today, we explore the intriguing background and cultural influences behind the issues addressed in the letter to the Colossians. In Colossians 2, it appears that some early Christians were drawn to mystical and apocalyptic elements present in a Judaism heavily influenced by Phrygian culture. Scholars have proposed various backgrounds for the errors faced in Colossae, including mystery cults, broader Hellenistic mysticism, Hellenistic Judaism, and even Qumran-type Judaism. These suggestions shed light on the broader cultural ideas that influenced the challenges Paul confronted in Colossae. Even though Qumran parallels were limited to Judea, they provide evidence of certain Jewish beliefs that were more widespread during this period. However, it is important to note that the idea of Gnosticism, while often mentioned, lacks substantial evidence since full Gnostic systems did not emerge until a later period. Nevertheless, the errors in Colossae may reflect a synthesis of different thought streams that eventually developed towards Gnosticism.

Notably, the presence of Jewish Sibylline oracles from the region and the later activities of Christian Montanists suggest the possibility of ecstatic elements within the local Judaism that may have influenced the Colossians. The book of Acts attests that Paul engaged with philosophically inclined audiences during this period, as he preached Christ to them. Paul's letters, such as Ephesians and Colossians, provide us with insights into his familiarity with popular-level Greek philosophy and the prevailing philosophical ideas that permeated both Gentile and Jewish thought in Asia Minor during the mid-first century.

### Location



Colossae was an ancient city located in the Lycus River Valley of Phrygia, a region in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). While Colossae was not a major metropolis like Ephesus or Corinth, its strategic location along major trade routes made it significant in the context of early Christianity. The city's proximity to neighboring cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis, allowed for cultural and commercial exchange, contributing to its influence in the region. Paul, despite never

having visited Colossae personally, wrote a letter to the Colossians as a means of addressing specific

<sup>22</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 567.

challenges and theological issues that had arisen in the local Christian community. This letter, known as the Epistle to the Colossians, sought to combat false teachings and reinforce the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, encouraging the believers to stand firm in their faith and resist the influence of various philosophical and religious ideas prevalent in the area. Though Paul had not yet set foot in Colossae, his concern for the spiritual well-being of the community prompted him to offer guidance and support through his epistle.

### Authorship

Today, we briefly examine the interesting topic of the authorship of the letter to the Colossians. While there is some debate among scholars, not all agree that the apostle Paul himself wrote the letter. Some propose that a disciple or follower of Paul wrote it in his name, with his approval or in faithful adherence to his teachings. Others suggest that Paul dictated the letter to a scribe, as he did with many of his previous letters. The general consensus is that the letter was composed during Paul's lifetime, which aligns with the period when he likely wrote the letter to the Philippians as well.

As Paul's ministry progressed, he began incorporating language and ideas from popular philosophies of the time, which can be seen in his letters, including Colossians. While he occasionally borrows some language from false teachers to refute their teachings, the majority of the language used in Colossians can be found in Paul's undisputed writings, despite their differences. Given the brevity of the letter, the use of a scribe, similarities with Paul's other letters, and the passage of several years since his earlier writings, the differences between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline letters do not necessarily indicate different authors. It is worth noting that pseudonymous letters, written in someone else's name, were typically composed long after the person's death. Considering that Colossae was devastated by an earthquake and not fully restored after 60-64 AD, it is unlikely that a letter purportedly addressing the church there would have been written after that time. Additionally, a forgery would have likely been discovered during Paul's lifetime, which likely extended until at least 64 AD.

### Outline

#### I. Introduction

##### A. Greeting and thanksgiving (Colossians 1:1-14)

Epaphras (Col. 1.7)

“Epaphras” was a common name; this may well be the same Epaphras of Philemon 23. But Philippi and Colossae are too distant geographically for us to think that this is the same person as Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25, although that name could legitimately be contracted as “Epaphras.”<sup>23</sup>

##### B. The preeminence of Christ (Colossians 1:15-23)

ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως. “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature” (Col. 1.15)

Paul's theological assertion regarding Jesus as the "image of the invisible God" reflects his understanding of the relationship between the Son and the Father. Employing a poetic style, Paul conveys the notion

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<sup>23</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 570.

that while the Son is perceptible, the Father, in contrast, exists in a manner in which mortal man is not privileged to see. By describing Jesus as the image of the invisible God, Paul suggests that Jesus, as the incarnate Son, provides a tangible manifestation of the divine nature that can be comprehended by humanity, thereby bridging the gap between the human realm and the transcendent realm of the Father. This concept highlights Paul's theological perspective on the accessibility of the divine through the person of Jesus Christ. One commentator wrote, "*Invisible*, incidentally, is a very unfortunate translation since it implies that God could never appear. *Unseen* is better, implying the possibility that God will appear-that he is temporarily unseen but not permanently unseeable."<sup>24</sup>

## II. Paul's Ministry and Teaching

A. The mystery of God's plan revealed (Colossians 1:24-29)

B. Warning against deceptive philosophies and human traditions (Colossians 2:1-10)

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh (Col. 2.1).

Although Paul had never met most of the Colossian Christians personally, he expresses his longing for them; this was a common element of ancient "letters of friendship." Colossae was in the Lycus Valley and not on an easy route from Ephesus. Like Colossae, Laodicea was in Phrygia; it was roughly ten miles west of Colossae.<sup>25</sup>

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2.9).

"Some have interpreted this passage to mean that the Godhead-Father, Son, and Holy Ghost-are the same person, or three persons in one. Paul is anxious to combat the heretical notion that Christ was not a physical being and that his bodily suffering, death, and resurrection were only fictional. In countering this false notion, and in order to emphasize the supremacy of the Savior above man and angels, Paul teaches that the fulness of the Godhead's glory, honor, and power is in Christ physically, or bodily-that is, nothing is lacking in the Savior that requires man to seek some other source or means of salvation."<sup>26</sup>

C. Exhortation to hold fast to Christ – Paul's Warnings Against False Teachings (Colossians 2:11-23)

Colossians 2.15-23 can be confusing, as it presents some complex ideas. It certainly presents several interpretive possibilities, and scholars have proposed various understandings of Paul's message in this passage. Here are a few interpretations to consider:

1. Jewish Ritual Practices: Some scholars argue that Paul is addressing Jewish ritual practices, such as observance of the Sabbath, dietary regulations, and festivals (Col. 2.16). They suggest that Paul emphasizes that these practices were merely shadows or foreshadowings of the reality found in Christ. Paul contends that these rituals should not be considered essential for salvation or used as a basis for spiritual superiority.

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<sup>24</sup> Neal A. Lambert, ed., [Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience](#) [Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981], p. 75-76.

<sup>25</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 573.

<sup>26</sup> J. Lewis Taylor, "[New Testament Backgrounds: Colossians](#)," *Ensign*, Mar. 1976.

2. **Asceticism and Philosophy:** Another interpretation focuses on Paul's critique of ascetic practices and philosophical teachings that were prevalent in Colossae.<sup>27</sup> Paul might be addressing a form of asceticism that involves strict self-denial and harsh treatment of the body. He warns against adopting these practices as means of achieving spiritual enlightenment or favor with God, emphasizing instead the sufficiency of Christ's work.
3. **Syncretism and False Teachings:** Some scholars suggest that Paul is confronting syncretistic beliefs and false teachings that combined elements of Jewish, pagan, and philosophical thought. They argue that Paul warns against being captivated by human traditions, worldly principles, and elemental spiritual forces, urging the Colossians to remain rooted in the truth of Christ.
4. **Worship of Angels:** Another interpretation focuses on the reference to the worship of angels (Col. 2:18). Some scholars propose that Paul is addressing an angelic hierarchy or angel veneration present in Colossae.<sup>28</sup> He asserts that such practices detract from the preeminence of Christ and emphasizes that believers should worship and submit only to Christ, the head of the Church.

18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God (Col. 2:18-19).

“What was the 'Colossian heresy'? Biographies and commentaries discuss it but add little more than Colossians itself discloses. Some were debasing Christ's divinity and role in the Godhead, for chapter 2 refutes those who fail to hold Christ as 'the Head' (Col. 2:19), whereas chapter 1 has Paul's most sustained testimony of the divinity and power of the Son. There is little contemporary religious information, but the writings of John went to the same locality some forty years later.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Paul does not believe in “beating down the body” (2:23), but he is willing to speak of amputating appendages or “putting them to death” in a figurative sense. Perhaps borrowing an image from Jesus (Mk 9:43, 45, 47), Paul here describes passions as “members of the body.” (The body was not evil, but indulging all its desires without observing God’s restrictions was. Philo speaks occasionally of the soul’s needing to extinguish the body; but most thinkers recognized that morally therapeutic amputations were ineffectual, such as post-adolescent castration, which did not remove sexual desires; they would mean such statements metaphorically.) But one puts to death the sinful lifestyle by depending on one’s finished death in Christ (3:3-4), not by harsh treatment of the physical body (2:18, 20-23). The sins Paul lists here are typical sins Gentile converts to Judaism would have committed before their conversion. See: Keener, *Background*, p. 576.

<sup>28</sup> We might be seeing this in verse 15: “having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” Christ's triumph over spiritual forces seems to be the theme here in this passage. Many scholars interpret the “powers and authorities” as referring to spiritual forces such as demons or fallen angels. Paul asserts that through his death and resurrection, Christ has effectively disarmed these forces, rendering them powerless. By triumphing over them, Christ publicly exposed their defeat and showcased his own triumph. This could also have a double meaning, as Paul may be speaking in code. Some scholars propose that Paul's language in this verse has a subversive message within the context of the Roman Empire. They argue that the “powers and authorities” could be interpreted as referring to the imperial powers that claimed ultimate authority and demanded allegiance. Paul's affirmation of Christ's triumph over them would have been seen as a challenge to the Roman political order, affirming the lordship of Christ over all. “Rule and authority” probably refers to the angelic powers thought to rule the nations of the world, a doctrine that is somehow central to the erring persons wishing to influence the Colossian Christians. See: Keener, *Background*, p. 574.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Lloyd Anderson, [Understanding Paul](#), Deseret Book, 1983, p. 246 - 247.

From my reading, this part of Colossians could also be read as a polemic against Gnostic ideas or many of the Gnosticisms that were floating around in Paul's day. There were many versions of Gnosticism, and they were not all the same! Some common characteristics include:

- a. A secret tradition (the 40 day ministry of Jesus)
- b. Dualism – light/dark – powers exist from both spheres
- c. Separate creator from God – called the “Demiurge”
- d. Matter = usually something bad (not always from my reading)
- e. Docetism – this meant that Jesus (in many Gnostic traditions) “seemed”

There were many branches of this teaching, here I will cite three main branches of Gnosticism:

1. Speculative/Theosophic Gnostics – Valentinus - Speculative Gnostics sought to understand the complex cosmology of the universe, exploring themes such as the origins of the divine, the nature of the divine spark within humanity, and the processes of salvation and redemption.<sup>30</sup>
2. Ascetic Gnostics – super strict (Marcion- he also rejected O.T., seeing the “God of the Hebrew Bible” as not representing true Christian ideals.<sup>31</sup>
3. Antinomian Gnostics – “no rules” Gnostics<sup>32</sup> – Nicolaitans – see Rev. 2.6-15.

Some things that the Gnostics have in common with LDS theology:

- a. 40 day temple teaching/tradition
- b. Temples and ascension texts

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<sup>30</sup> Speculative or theosophic Gnostics held a distinct set of beliefs within the broader Gnostic movement. These Gnostics focused on the pursuit of deep spiritual knowledge (gnosis) to gain insight into the divine realms and the nature of existence. They were characterized by their emphasis on philosophical speculation, metaphysical concepts, and esoteric teachings. They often delved into intricate mythological narratives and intricate systems of emanation, attempting to unravel the mysteries of the spiritual realm and the material world. Speculative or theosophic Gnostics considered themselves as possessors of secret knowledge that offered a deeper understanding of reality and the means to liberate the divine essence within humanity. One of the prominent figures associated with the speculative or theosophic Gnostic ideas was Valentinus, a Gnostic teacher who lived in the 2nd century CE. Valentinus was renowned for his philosophical and speculative approach to Gnosticism. He developed an elaborate cosmological system that incorporated complex emanationist theories and focused on the role of spiritual knowledge (gnosis) in achieving salvation and union with the divine. Valentinus' teachings had a significant influence on the development of Gnostic thought, and his ideas resonated with many followers who sought to delve into the metaphysical and theosophical aspects of Gnosticism. See: [Valentnus \(Gnostic\)](#), Wikipedia, accessed 7.5.23.

<sup>31</sup> See: [Marcion and the Marcionite Churches](#), accessed 7.5.23.

<sup>32</sup> Antinomian Gnostic beliefs refer to a theological perspective within Gnosticism that rejects the importance of moral laws or ethical codes in the pursuit of spiritual salvation and enlightenment. Followers of antinomian Gnosticism emphasize the radical separation between the spiritual realm and the material world, asserting that salvation is attained solely through acquiring secret knowledge (gnosis) and transcending the constraints of physical existence. They argue that since the material world is inherently flawed and corrupt, moral actions and adherence to religious laws hold little significance. This perspective often leads to a disregard for conventional moral norms and an emphasis on personal freedom and liberation from societal constraints. See: [Antinomiansim](#), Britannica, accessed 7.5.23.

- c. Overcoming the flesh
- d. Premortal life (see Apocryphon of James, 10.15–20 (NHL, 33).
- e. Multiple heavens
- f. The importance of coming back into the presence of God
- g. The gospel was introduced even to Adam
- h. Ritual teaching was part of the inner circle of believers
- i. Sacred marriage
- j. Marriage that lasted beyond this life/"Beyond the Veil" readings of marriage
- k. Adam and other leaders has premortal roles assigned to them
- l. Many Gnostic texts affirmed that an apostasy was imminent

### **So was this written to "put down" Gnosticism? / The Overall Message of Colossians**

We don't know. There is no scholarly agreement about who these people were. The author of this letter attacks false teaching (2.8,16-18,20-23), emphasizes Christ's role in salvation (1.15-23), he commends them for their goodness (2.5), reissues household codes as seen elsewhere (3.18-4.1), and encourages the saints to walk in wisdom's paths (4.5-6).

### **III. Living in Christ**

#### **A. Putting off the old self and putting on the new self (Colossians 3:1-17)**

"There is neither Jew nor Greek" (Col. 3.11).

Sister Okazaki taught:

"Marian Wright Edelman, a powerful advocate in the United States for children, is fond of observing: "When Christ told His disciples to let the little children 'come unto me,' He did not say rich children or white children or smart children or nondisabled children. He said, 'Let the children come unto me.' And so it must be. Will we learn to look beyond the simple barriers of culture, nation, and class to see that we are all precious and valuable to God? I believe we must."<sup>33</sup>

#### **B. Instructions for Christian households (Colossians 3:18-4:1)**

"Husbands love your wives" (Col. 3.18).

President Nelson taught:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Eph. 5:25) With that kind of love, brethren, we will be better husbands and fathers, more loving and spiritual leaders. Happiness at home is most likely to be achieved when practices there are

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<sup>33</sup> Chieko Okazaki, *Disciples*, Deseret Book, 1998, p. 146.



founded upon the teachings of Jesus Christ. Ours is the responsibility to ensure that we have family prayer, scripture study, and family home evening. Ours is the responsibility to prepare our children to receive the ordinances of salvation and exaltation and the blessings promised to tithe payers. Ours is the privilege to bestow priesthood blessings of healing, comfort, and direction. The home is the great laboratory of love. There the raw chemicals of selfishness and greed are melded in the crucible of cooperation to yield compassionate concern and love one for another. Honor the special sisters in your lives, brethren. Express your love to your wife, to your mother, and to the sisters. Praise them for their forbearance with you even when you are not at your best. Thank the Lord for these sisters who-like our Heavenly Father-love us not only for what we are but for what we may become. Humbly I thank God for my mother, my sisters, my daughters, granddaughters, and for my special sweetheart, companion, and friend-my wife!"<sup>34</sup>

#### **IV. Prayer, Wisdom, and Relationships**

##### A. Prayer for open doors and effective proclamation (Colossians 4:1-6)

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven (Col. 4.1).

Some Greek and Roman philosophers warned that masters themselves could become slaves someday (unlikely as this was), so they should treat their slaves rightly. Aristotle attacked philosophers in his own day who said that slavery was against nature and therefore wrong. By contrast, Paul clearly believes all people are by nature equal before God; although he does not address slavery as an institution here, what he does write thus suggests that he does not favor it. Although he has no control over the system, he can warn masters to keep in mind their status before God. For an example of a situation in which he does have more potential influence, see Philemon.<sup>35</sup>

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man (Col. 4.6).

Salt was a preserving and flavoring agent; thus Paul probably refers to speech designed to make sense to outsiders and be relevant to them (cf. the common ancient depiction of pleasant speech as "honeyed"). When a particular rhetorician recommended salting one's words properly, he seems to have meant sarcastic wit; in this context, Paul seems to mean instead a gentle answer (cf. Prov 15:1).<sup>36</sup>

##### B. Commendation and greetings (Colossians 4:7-18)

#### **V. Conclusion**

##### A. Final instructions and encouragement (Colossians 4:7-9)

##### B. Farewell and benediction (Colossians 4:10-18)

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<sup>34</sup> President Nelson, "[Our Sacred Duty to Honor Women](#)," *Ensign*, May 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 578.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*