

# Paul



## Scripture

**Romans 3:21-26** • But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

**I Corinthians 1:20-25** • Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

**Galatians 3:26-29** • You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

**Ephesians 4:11-13** • It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

**Philippians 2:5-11** • Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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.

**Colossians 1:15-20** • He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 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. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 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.

## Introduction to Paul

Who were the two dominant Jewish teachers of the generation before Saul and what were their positions?

For the first-century Jew 'zeal' was something you did with a knife.  
—N.T. Wright

What were the four fundamentals of Saul's Jewish worldview?

Who did Saul suppose was talking to him from heaven on the road to Damascus?

What did Ananias reveal to Saul about God's plan for his life?

Saul, like a great many Jews of his day, read the Jewish Bible not least as a story in search of an ending; and he conceived his own task as being to bring that ending about. The story ran like this. Israel had been called to be the covenant people of the creator God, to be the light that would lighten the dark world, the people through whom God would undo the sin of Adam and its effects. But Israel had become sinful, and as a result had gone into exile, away from her own land. Although she had returned geographically from her exile, the real exilic condition was not yet finished. The promises had not yet been fulfilled. The Temple had not yet been rebuilt. The Messiah had not yet come. The pagans had not yet been reduced to submission, nor had they begun to make pilgrimages to Zion to learn Torah. Israel was still deeply compromised and sinful.

—N.T. Wright

## Key Concepts: The Courtroom Metaphor

How did Saul understand God's judgment?

How did Paul understand God's judgment after he met Jesus on the Damascus road?

Within the context of a courtroom, what does it mean for a judge to be righteous? What about for the defendant?

How does God's righteousness go beyond that of a judge in a courtroom?

What did God do when Israel proved faithless to keep their end of the covenant?

## The Gospel According to Paul

How would Jews have understood the term 'gospel'? And Romans?

How is the cross the center of Paul's theology?

What is God to do? Paul's answer is that the Messiah, King Jesus, has been the true, faithful Israelite. Underneath the dense theology of the passage just quoted stands Paul's central gospel scene: the death and resurrection of Jesus, seen as the point at which, and the means by which, God's covenant purposes for Israel, that is, his intention to deal once and for all with the sin of the world, would finally be accomplished. God has dealt with sin in the cross of Jesus; he has now vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead. 'The faithfulness of Jesus'... is thus the means whereby the righteousness of God is revealed.

--N.T. Wright

How did the resurrection change Paul's eschatology?

What do the crucifixion and resurrection mean?

What was so dangerous about saying 'Jesus is Lord'?

Contrary to what casual onlookers might have thought, when Jesus was crucified it was he who was leading the principalities and powers in his triumphal procession, celebrating his victory over them, instead of the other way around. . . . The death of Jesus, seen as the culmination of his great act of obedience, is the means whereby the reign of sin and death is replaced with the reign of grace and righteousness. 'The gospel' is indeed the announcement of a royal victory.

--N.T. Wright

## **Closer Look: 1 Corinthians 15**

What is the power of the gospel?

What happens when Christ returns?

What kind of body will we have at the resurrection?

## 1 Corinthians 15 | Resurrection

1 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. 11 Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

29 Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them? 30 And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? 31 I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord. 32 If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised,

“Let us eat and drink,

for tomorrow we die.” 33 Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” 34 Come back to your senses as

you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.

35 But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39 All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

50 I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

55 “Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

## Discussion Questions

If Jesus is King, then what about governments?

If Jesus is King, then what about the financial markets?

If Jesus is King, then what about the environment?

If Jesus is King, then what about your body?

If Jesus is King, then what about sin?

## Suggested Resources

**N.T. Wright** | What Saint Paul Really Said

**N.T. Wright** | Paul

**Thomas Schreiner** | Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ

**John Polhill** | Paul & His Letters

**Gordon Fee** | Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God

## Romans | Outline

**1-4 | righteousness** | There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (3:22b-24)

Paul begins his epic letter to the Romans by demonstrating that Jews and Gentiles are both in the same boat--they have both committed egregious sin against God, and they are both in need of the same redemption, which is only available through Jesus Christ. The first two chapters read like a catalogue of the sin of all mankind--those who had no law from God to guide them and those that did. Paul drives his point home in chapter three with an extensive amalgamation of Old Testament quotations, beginning with the terse statement from Psalm 14: "There is no one righteous, not even one." What are we to do? God gave humanity a law, a way to live that would please him, and yet still nobody could be called righteous.

Just when it seems there is no hope, Paul announces the good news in 3:21: "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known.... This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." God's provision of the law failed to make anyone righteous, so now he has provided righteousness itself, to which we have access through faith in his son, Jesus. This righteousness-by-faith, Paul argues, should have been apparent to everyone who knew their Torah, because Abraham himself was declared righteous because of his faith in God.

**5-8 | life** | For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (5:17)

This righteousness-by-faith opens up a whole new way of living; it literally changes everything. We now have peace with God through Jesus Christ. Humanity is no longer at war with their Creator because he has made an offer of peace by sacrificing his son for our sins. Our former existence, which can be characterized by death through the sin of Adam, is now replaced with a new existence, characterized by life through Jesus Christ.

Paul carries this theme of death and life into chapter 6 by declaring that our old way of existing was crucified with Jesus on his cross, and now we are free to live in the power of his resurrection. Paul is keenly aware, however, that this we are still in process. Though he speaks of dying and living again, he knows that this is an ongoing, recurring process. It is a struggle between the desires of the sinful nature and the desires of the renewed self in Christ. Paul presses this out further by naming the former "the law of sin and death" and the latter "the law of the Spirit of life". Sin is death, and in sin we are dead. But the Spirit gives life, and through him we have received and will receive true life. The future, after all, is bright for believers as well as for all creation, because everything that was made is awaiting its full and final redemption.

**9-11 | israel** | For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? (11:15)

Paul now moves into a very dense argument over the nature of salvation, couching it in terms of Israel's history and their current rejection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He seems to assert, from the outset, that the true Israel is composed of those who live by faith. He also makes an important point about God being sovereign throughout salvation history, even down to the present day. Paul is clearly heartbroken that his fellow Israelites have rejected the gospel, but he is also confident that one day they will turn to Jesus. Using the image of an olive tree, he compares the Gentiles to a wild olive shoot that has been grafted into a domesticated tree. Israel, on the other hand, are branches from the domesticated tree that have been lopped off. The Gentiles should be careful not to get arrogant however, because one day God will graft those natural branches back into the tree.

**12-16 | ethics** | Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (13:14)

Paul's epic theological treatise turns abruptly into a beautiful and challenging exhortation to live a fully Christian life. He begins with that classic devotional statement: "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices". But most of what he writes here deals with relationships between believers. He encourages them over and over to love one another. As a direct application to this, he tells those who are strong in the faith to bear with those who are weak, particularly when it comes to eating food that has been sacrificed to idols. He speaks at length about being careful not to judge one another, but rather to accept each other just as Christ has accepted us. The letter ends with a lengthy list of greetings to fellow believers Paul knows in Rome.

## 1 Corinthians | Outline

**1-4 | wisdom** | For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1:21)

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians begins with an appeal to the church to be united and set aside the personality cults that had developed. The church had broken into factions, which had formed around charismatic and popular leaders like Peter, Apollos, Paul, and even Jesus himself. Paul thought this to be such a devastating move that he opens his letter, which is full of rebukes and exhortations, condemning this disunity.

Wisdom and foolishness also occupy a good portion of this first section of the letter. Wisdom was of paramount importance in Greco-Roman culture, particularly in a place like Corinth, which was perhaps the most prosperous Greek city of that time, but still stood in the shadow of the older, wiser city of Athens. The trouble for Christians was that there was nothing wise about the cross; in fact, crucifixion was an utterly offensive thing to discuss in polite society. Paul's answer is that God is turning the wisdom of the world upside down through the cross, which is the full representation of his own wisdom.

He then makes his way back to the issue of divisions within the church, this time giving a theological solution to the problem of disunity. We are, collectively, the new temple of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The "you" here is plural, indicating that the Christian community itself is where God now dwells with people on earth. With this in mind, he encourages the Corinthians to reject the wisdom of this world, the pursuit of which seems to be at the root of these divisions, and to become "fools" for Christ.

**5-10 | issues** | Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. (10:24)

Beginning in chapter 5, Paul addresses a series of issues in the Corinthian church that they either wrote him about or that he has heard about through a messenger. The first issue is an extremely embarrassing situation involving a brother who is sleeping with his step-mother. With the strongest language possible, Paul urges the church to kick him out until he repents. In fact, he says to hand this man over to Satan to be taught a lesson.

The second issue is about lawsuits within the church, another extremely embarrassing situation. The Corinthians apparently had such sharp disagreements amongst themselves that they were taking each other to court--pagan courts, no less! Again, Paul turns to a theological argument to encourage the believers to work things out in house: "Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!" The third issue is general sexual immorality, the solution to which is the understanding that our bodies have been united to Christ, so how could we possibly unite those bodies to a prostitute.

The fourth issue is marriage, which is the first of several problems they wrote him about. There are actually two important questions related to the issue of marriage: What about a preexisting marriage to an unbeliever; and what about remaining single. On the issue of marriage to an unbeliever, Paul encourages the Christian to stay in the marriage if the unbeliever is willing. But if they are not willing to stay, the Christian spouse must let them go because God has called us to live in peace. As to the second issue, Paul urges single folks to stay single, that way they are more free to serve God and not tied down in this life. On the other hand, however, he understands the overwhelming sexual temptation that existed in a place like Corinth, so he encourages those who must get married to do so.

The fifth issue is about food sacrificed to idols and how eating such food could harm the conscience of new or weaker believers. Paul urges those who are not troubled by such things to look out for those who are, and to exercise their freedom out of consideration for others.

**11-16 | body** | Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (12:27)

Paul transitions in chapter 11 to issues that involve different forms of bodies. The first issue has to do with the Lord's Supper--the celebration of the Lord's body and blood given for the world. The Corinthians were engaging in an awful malpractice of the Lord's Supper: the rich folks were arriving first and eating all the food before the poor folks got there! Anyone who takes the bread and cup in an unworthy manner, he says, is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Jesus.

The second body is the body of Christ, and how the Spirit empowers each member of the Church to function within the body. The Spirit gives many different gifts, he says, and none are more or less important than any others. The Corinthians had gotten themselves to a place where they valued the gift of tongues above all other spiritual gifts. In fact, they were using the gifts of the Spirit as identifying marks of spirituality. This is why we find the famous *agape* love poem in between Paul's two discourses on spiritual gifts. The point he is making is that whatever your spiritual gift might be, you must exercise it in love.

The third body is the resurrection body that awaits each of us after we die. Some within the congregation had been denying that there could be a resurrection, which Paul takes to mean that Jesus himself could not have risen from the dead. If that were true, then Christians were throwing their lives away on this faith. But, in fact, Christ was raised, and so will we be. The body that awaits us is like the full grown tree of which this body is just the seed.

## 2 Corinthians | Outline

**1-6 | covenant** | But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (4:7)

Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth was taken very hard, as it is clear from the second letter that they were deeply stung by the harsh words Paul had for them. So he begins his second letter emphasizing the comfort of God, making a pastoral switch in tone from the prophetic fire of 1 Corinthians. Paul's conscience is clear in the way that he dealt with them, and he even planned to visit them to encourage them in person. But plans changed, and just as he's beginning to tell them about his change of plans he gets sidetracked by the glory of God and goes on a long rabbit trail of covenant theology.

We are ministers of a new covenant, Paul preaches. This covenant is not like the old one, which was written on stone tablets. The new covenant is written on the hearts of men and women who turn their lives over to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul, and the other apostles, are ministers of this new covenant, chosen by God not because they are the best candidates, but because they are, in a sense, the weakest and the worst. God did this so that he could display his power through the weakness of weak men, rather than through the strongest and most talented "superapostles". This new covenant comes with the promise of resurrection in the next life and the ministry of reconciliation in this life.

**7-13 | generosity** | Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. (9:6)

At the beginning of chapter seven Paul gets back to telling his story about why he couldn't come to Corinth. Titus had showed up from Corinth, and gave Paul great comfort at the way that his first letter had led the congregation to repentance.

The primary reason Paul is writing Corinth seems to be to encourage them to follow through on the generous gift they had promised to give to other churches who were currently suffering. Other churches, far poorer than Corinth, had given joyfully, and Paul had boasted about the generosity of the people in Corinth. He did not want to be let down, so he wrote them to ensure that they would give the generous gift they had promised the year before.

The last four chapters of the book are taken up with Paul's defense of his ministry. Apparently, some of these "superapostles" were denigrating Paul to the Corinthians, saying he is bold in his letters but meek in person. He responds by giving an account of how much he had suffered for the sake of the gospel, which is backwards way of defending yourself in that culture, because it was assumed the best apostles would live the best lives, free from trials and strife. Not so, says Paul. Anyone who follows Jesus must suffer as he did.

## Galatians | Outline

**1-4 | gospel** | There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (3:28)

Paul dispenses with the pleasantries in what some scholars believe is his very first epistle. He gets right to the point and goes after the Galatians for forsaking the gospel he had just preached to them. Some teachers who claimed to be from James in Jerusalem had followed Paul into Galatia and told the converts there that they must be circumcised in order to be saved. Not only that, but they must fully obey the law of Moses.

Nothing irritates Paul more than changing the gospel, and he calls for anyone who adds to the gospel of Jesus Christ to be eternally condemned! He begrudgingly gives an account of his own authority and apostleship, declaring that this gospel came to him directly from the risen Jesus, and he later confirmed it with the pillars of the faith in Jerusalem.

Everything is at stake, here, because the Galatians are now trying to be justified before God by obeying the Mosaic law. But 1500 years of Israel's history should tell them that's not possible, and now the only way to be justified is by faith in Jesus Christ. Using examples from the Old Testament, Paul demonstrates that the law was always meant to be fulfilled by the promise, which has now been enacted through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**5-6 | spirit** | Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (6:2)

The last two chapters of the book take up the implications of this "salvation by grace" theology. "It is for freedom," Paul writes, "that Christ has set us free." We are free from the curse of the law, and now free to live by the Spirit. A life lived indulging the sinful nature will bear certain fruits, and so will a life lived full of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Paul concludes his letter by dismissing circumcision altogether, and declaring that the only thing that counts is that each person has been made into a new creation.

## Ephesians | Outline

**1-3 | grace** | For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. (2:8)

Ephesians reads much more formally than Galatians, which may mean that it is more generic in its audience, meant to be read by several churches in a circuit rather than one particular congregation. In fact, it appears that Paul has never visited and does not know the Ephesian church. He begins the letter with lofty praise to God for all the grace he has lavished on us, and then offers praise and encouragement to the Ephesians for their faith.

The theology of this letter is more general, which means that we find here a wonderful presentation of the gospel rather than theological overtures applied to very specific situations. God's grace, which saves us through faith in Jesus Christ, is front and center. Out of this grace comes a new identity--a new creation--for all who believe; and out of that new identity comes a new community of saints that is bonded together by Jesus Christ. Here, again, we find the metaphor of the body, each part working together to cause the body to grow into full maturity.

At the end of chapter three Paul offers a beautiful prayer for the Ephesians, that they might know the extent of God's love for them.

**4-6 | light** | For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light. (5:8a)

Chapter four signifies a turning point in the letter, where Paul moves from theology to ethics. The Christian ethic is always rooted in the theology of God's grace, and this is what we find as Paul calls the Ephesians to live as children of light because of God's grace to them in Jesus Christ. Chapters four and five are full of commands on how Christians are to relate to one another, particularly in the realm of speech and sexuality.

The last half of chapter five is a very famous discourse on Christian households. Paul uses a common form of writing from the Roman world called a "household code", but the distinctions he makes are quite remarkable. Greco-Roman household codes generally contained little or no instruction for the husband and father--he was the *pater familias*, and his word was law. But Paul writes lengthy instructions to Christian husbands and fathers, urging them to imitate Christ by laying down their lives for their wives, just as Jesus laid down his life for the church.

The final chapter is most famous for the armor of God discourse, in which Paul uses military metaphor to encourage the saints to resist the devil and his schemes. The battle, he writes, is not against other people, but against dark spiritual powers. This battle can only be won by using the weapons and armor that come from God--truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God and prayer.

## Philippians | Outline

**1-4 | chains** | Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. (4:8)

Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians while in prison, perhaps even while he was under house arrest in Rome during the last two years of his life. It is much more personal than Ephesians, and much more gracious than Galatians; but it is not constructed like the other two letters. Although he is in prison, Paul is convinced that the gospel is being advanced through him just as it had been when he was free.

In chapter two we find a stunning hymn about Jesus, recounting his humility of leaving heaven, emptying himself of everything, and dying for our sakes. Because of his humility and subsequent resurrection and exaltation, every one will bow before him and confess that he truly is the Lord of all. Our calling for today, then, is to imitate the humility of Jesus and live out this salvation with "fear and trembling".

As with the Galatians, Paul urges the Philippians to avoid those who try to teach Christians to be circumcised and obey the Mosaic law. They are dogs, he says, and flesh-mutilators. Paul's credentials in Judaism were second to none, and now he considers it all rubbish for the sake of the gospel. The book concludes with some final exhortations and an expression of thanks for the way the Philippians have cared for Paul's needs while he has been in prison.

## Colossians | Outline

**1-4 | wisdom** | We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. (1:28)

Colossians reads much more like Ephesians than Galatians or Philippians. Indeed, much of the first chapter seems like it was copied and pasted from Ephesians. Paul's prayer for the church in Colosse is much the same as it is for the church in Ephesus. The theological emphases of Colossians focus not as explicitly on grace as they do on wisdom and the supremacy of Christ. Wisdom, in fact, is an underlying theme throughout the book, much like it is in 1 Corinthians.

As in many of his letters, Paul tells his recipients about his work for the sake of the gospel. He then goes on in chapter two to exhort the believers to avoid "hollow and deceptive philosophy", which is another example of the wisdom of the world being made to look foolish by the wisdom of God. Rules and regulations about eating, drinking, and religious festivals are all nonsense, he writes, and never did anything to help anybody be more righteous. The real foundation for living a righteous life is the resurrection of Christ, and our participation in his resurrection through faith and baptism. Much of the ethical content of Colossians is an abridged version of what is found in most of Paul's other letters.

## 1 Thessalonians | Outline

**1-3 | thanksgiving** | How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? (3:9)

In this first half of the letter Paul is overwhelmed with thanksgiving for the reported state of the church in Thessalonica. It is shown here that success in ministry is not about numbers or financials but about simple things, profound things, like the acceptance of the Word preached, good deeds done, and love shown to outsiders. The work of Christ is to make us imitators of Christ – this pleases Paul, and no doubt God as well.

**4-5 | hope** | But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. (5:8)

Paul again calls the believers at Thessalonica to live a holy life, to grow deeper in the right way to which they currently hold. Things then switch gears to an exhortation on the apocalyptic hope the Church holds in Christ Jesus. The fact that this famous discussion on the resurrection and transformation coming in the return of Christ is bookended by discourses on how we should be treating those around us now is an instruction on the proper focus of our life of faith. Christianity is not escapism, looking forward to when the believer will be free of this world, but rather it is that hope of Christ that should spur the body on to good work and humble compassion as we await the imminent return of the Lord.

## 2 Thessalonians | Outline

**1 | growth** | All this is evidence that God's judgment is right and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (1:5)

This letter opens with what seems to be a confirmation of Paul's hope for growth from his first letter to the Thessalonians; their love and grace is increasing, even in the face of persecution. Again, Paul's prayer is that this will continue.

**2 | perspective** | Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (2:5)

It is possible with the increase of persecution and the already present confusion about the fate of the dead (from the first letter) that many in the church had been convinced that their present circumstances were proof of the second coming of Christ. Paul exhorts the church to not be so easily deceived. It is necessary to view our current situations through the lens of eternity, and Paul reminds them of the prior teaching he has given them on this very subject, both in his last letter and in person. They are to continue to stand firm and rely on their hope in Jesus.

**3 | work** | We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. (3:11)

As the Thessalonians strive to live lives of generosity and humility, they must also beware the temptation to take advantage of the generosity of others. If one is able to work and earn a living, then he has the responsibility to do just that. Idleness lends itself to the evils of gossip, chatter, and abuse of the goodwill of others. It is the perversion of the peace of the life of the believer. Each person must do their own part in the work of the body to continue the growth of the Church, none are to be idle.

## 1 Timothy | Outline

**1 | transformation** | ...I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience... (1:16a)

This first chapter of the letter to Timothy serves to remind Timothy of the reason for his need to remain in Ephesus and to encourage him in his ministry. We are shown again the common threat to the Church in the form of false teachers, whom Timothy is to rebuke and correct. Paul himself serves as the illustration for this ministry as a man who himself believed and taught incorrectly but was shown mercy and grace, being transformed into the man he is upon the writing of this letter. This ministry of correction and transformation is the ministry to which Timothy is commissioned.

**2-3 | church** | ...I am writing you these instructions so that...you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God. (3:14-15)

In these two chapters Paul gives Timothy instructions on how the church is supposed to function in the areas of worship and instruction. He also gives the famous list for the qualifications for being an overseer and a deacon.

**4-6 | instruction** | But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. (6:11)

These three chapters are a beautiful record of what godliness looks like in practical life; it is theology at work outside the pulpit. Here Paul instructs Timothy on how he should minister and teach the elders, youth, men, women, widows, and slaves under his ministry, and in doing so he also instructs those groups in how they should treat each other. Paul continually exhorts Timothy by his own authority over him and also encourages Timothy to take hold of his own authority granted him by Christ and His message. The final words of Paul in this letter are a vibrant hope of what this type of ministry creates: "Grace be with you [all]."

## 2 Timothy | Outline

**1-2 | endurance** | You then my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. (2:1)

Here again, Paul begins his second letter to Timothy with some much needed words of encouragement. Paul compares the trials in Timothy's ministry to the suffering he himself is going through and calls Timothy to stand firm through them. This endurance is also needed in the continued battle against the Gnostic heresy making its way into the church. Timothy is exhorted to continue preaching the truth so that those led astray will return to a proper knowledge of Christ.

**3-4 | perseverance** | Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing. (4:8)

As Paul sees the end of his life coming near, he warns Timothy that the worst is not yet upon them. Persecution and internal strife will continue to fight his ministry in Ephesus, but through Christ, truth and perseverance will win out. Just as Christ suffered faithfully to the end of his ministry on earth, Paul calls Timothy to humble and quiet perseverance.

## Titus | Outline

**1 | character** | Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless – (1:7a)

This letter begins with the contrasting of the true teachers and the false teachers. A list of requirements, similar to that mentioned in the letter to Timothy, is given for those entrusted with God's work. Titus is commissioned to appoint worthy men to be elders and overseers, that they may all correct the false teaching combating the mission of Christ's Church. The goal is that these false teachers would be returned to the truth, as Paul says, being "sound in the faith."

**2 | teaching** | You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. (2:1)

The letter continues with a hierarchical look at how those placed in position of authority over another have the responsibility to help lead those in their care in the path of faith. Titus and his overseers are to teach the elder men and women in the ways of faith so that those men and women may in turn teach the younger the same. Believing slaves are to be taught to also show Christ to their masters in their conduct. The whole Church is to be a picture of Christ, a people eager to do good.

**3 | humility** | But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (3:4-5a)

The natural conclusion to having a right character and correct teaching is a people that display true humility in all it does. This is how the Church is to act: to be instruments of peace and consideration, remembering that we are not that different from those who know not Christ. The people of God are not to waste time on meaningless arguments and things that only tear down relationships, but on showing love and doing good.

## Philemon | Outline

**1 | reconciliation** | For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, (15)

Paul writes to Philemon about a runaway slave named Onesimus. Though the reasons for Onesimus' abandonment of his master is not given, we learn that while on the run he encountered Paul and has subsequently become a believer in Christ. Through an overwhelming use of familial language Paul acts as a mediator between these two men, advocating a new relationship between the two, one not of slave and master but of friend and brother. Reconciliation is the goal between the two parties as they now share the most important bond possible, that of the commonality and equality in Jesus Christ.

