

Acts 2 Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Two: Paul's Prison Epistles - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon

Read Ephesians 1-3. Paul's teaching in the first half of Ephesians has tremendous implications for the believer.

- 1) Ephesians 1:3 says believers are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. List the specific blessings given in the following verses (pull out the key ideas from Paul's long, eloquent sentences).
 - a. 1:4 **God chose us to be holy and blameless, and He loves us.**
 - b. 1:5 **He has predestined our adoption as His children.**
 - c. 1:7a **He has redeemed and forgiven us.**
 - d. 1:6, 7b-8 **He has freely and lavishly bestowed His grace on us.**
 - e. 1:9 **He has revealed to us the mystery of His will.**
 - f. 1:11-12 **He chose us for the praise of His glory.**
 - g. 1:13 **He marked us with the seal of the Holy Spirit.**
 - h. 1:14 **He guarantees us an inheritance.**
 - i. 2:1, 5 **God graciously brought us from death to life.**
 - j. 2:10 **He prepared good works for us to do.**
 - k. 2:11-22, 3:6 **He made us part of a unified body of Jews and Gentiles who are in Christ.**
- 2) In 1:15-23 and 3:14-21, Paul follows up his teaching about the believer's wealth in Christ with two rich prayers. For what things does Paul pray (again, break down the sentences to draw out the key ideas)?
 - In chapter 1, Paul prays believers will better understand their rich position in Christ. (More specifically, he prays we will have wisdom, revelation and enlightenment to know God better [1:17], to know the hope of our calling [1:18], to know the extraordinary value God places on us as His own inheritance [v 18], and to know the incomparably great power that is ours in Christ [1:19].)
 - In chapter 3, Paul prays that God will empower us to understand our rich position more fully and that we will live according to this knowledge. (More specifically, he prays we will be empowered to make Christ more and more at home in our hearts [1:17], to grasp the depth of God's love for us [3:18], and to experience His love so that we become all that God wants us to be [1:19].)
- 3) From Ephesians 3:1-13, summarize Paul's calling in one sentence. **Paul believed he was called to unveil the mystery of the believers' riches in Christ and enlighten believers about how God chose to accomplish this (3:8-9).**
- 4) What truth or idea in Ephesians 1-3 most amazes you? **Personal sharing**

Read Ephesians 4-6. In light of our high calling, Paul urges believers to live in unity, purity, and victory.

- 5) What does Ephesians 4:2-16 teach about attaining unity and maturity in the body of Christ? **We promote unity and become mature by putting on humility, gentleness, patience and love (4:2), exercising our spiritual gifts (4:7-13), and speaking the truth in love (4:15).**
- 6) In Ephesians 4:17-6:9, Paul calls believers to purity. List the specific attitudes and actions that these verses call us to purify.

Attitudes

Greed (5:3, 5)
 A propensity to be ungrateful (5:20)
 Submission to others (5:21)
 Wives: respecting husbands (5:33)
 Husbands: loving wives (5:25, 38, 33)
 Children: honoring parents (6:1-3)

Actions

Speech (4:25, 29, 5:4, 19-20),
 especially when angry (4:26)
 Work (not laziness) (4:28, 5:16)
 Sex lives (5:3-4)
 Taking shortcuts to satisfaction or transformation (like drunkenness),
 rather than looking to God's Spirit for these (5:18)

Wives: submitting to husbands (5:22-24)
 Husbands: loving wives (5:25, 28, 33)
 Children: obeying parents (6:1-3)
 Fathers: patient training of children (6:4)

- 7) In Ephesians 6:10-20, Paul calls us to live victoriously in light of our high calling. List each piece of spiritual armor and a way you can use it to gain victory in a current, personal battle.

<u>Armor</u>	<u>Personal, Practical Use</u>
a) The Belt of Truth	Personal sharing
b) The Breastplate of Righteousness	Personal sharing
c) Feet Fitted with Readiness	Personal sharing
d) Shield of Faith	Personal sharing
e) Helmet of Salvation	Personal sharing
f) Sword of the Spirit (word of God)	Personal sharing
g) Prayer	Personal sharing

After noting the questions below, read Philippians 1-4.

- 8) Count the number of times Paul used the words joy, rejoice or glad in Philippians. Based on Paul's circumstances (given in 1:13-14) and the Philippians' circumstances (described in 1:29-30), do you think it strange that Paul wrote a letter to the Philippians in which joy was thematic? Finally, how does Paul's deep conviction, as expressed in 1:21, help you find joy in a difficulty you may now be facing? **Four uses of "joy" (1:4, 25; 2:2; 4:1), eight uses of "rejoice" (1:18 [twice]; 2:17, 18; 3:1; 4:4 [twice], 10) and three uses of "glad" (2:17, 18, 28). Paul was in prison and the Philippians were facing trials. Nevertheless, Paul wrote to them about rejoicing. His deep conviction that his life was for Christ and that to die was even better than remaining alive was not written out of depression or despair. Paul knew the secret of true joy: he saw all of his circumstances as opportunities to put Christ on display. Personal sharing**
- 9) Paul had special affection for the Philippians. What do the following passages reveal about their relationship: 2 Corinthians 11:9 (Philippi was in Macedonia); Philippians 2:25; 4:16, 18? **The Philippians were the one church from which Paul felt comfortable taking gifts. They had repeatedly sent him offerings and help. For example, they sent Epaphroditus from their congregation to assist Paul (along with other gifts). They were a generous church. In addition to what these specific passages reveal, the Philippian church must have been mature in the faith, since Paul had no severe words in his epistle to them, as he often did for other congregations.**
- 10) Paul covers a number of topics and offers many encouraging and challenging words in Philippians. Which verse or passage did you find especially meaningful for your present life and how will you apply it?
Personal sharing

Read Colossians 1-4.

- 11) Consider 1:15-20 and 2:9-23, in light of Colossians 2:4, 8. What do these passages suggest about Paul's purpose in writing Colossians? **2:4 and 8 suggest that the Colossian church was threatened by heresy. Although Gnosticism did not fully develop until the second century, the elements of the teachings the Colossians apparently received (those which Paul attempts to correct) may imply an early form of it. Paul had never met the Colossians (1:4, 7-8, 2:1), but heard of the threat (possibly through Epaphras, who founded the church [1:7-8; 4:12-13]). The letter emphasizes the supremacy of Christ in doctrine (chapters 1-2) and in practice (chapters 3-4).**

- 12) Colossians 1:15-20 is one of the premiere Christological statements in the New Testament. What does this passage teach about Christ? **Jesus is a physical representation of God and all that is God is in Him. He existed before creation/time, was directly involved in creation, and is the first ranking over all creation. All things were created for Him, He is supreme over all, and He holds it all together. He is also the first ranking of the resurrected. Christ reconciled all things to God and made peace through His blood, shed on the cross.**
- 13) Explain how Colossians 2:8 applies to your culture and how you can apply Colossians 3:16 to your own life today. **Personal sharing**

Read Philemon.

- 14) Based on the content of the letter, why did Paul write Philemon? **Paul was sending Onesimus (presumably, a runaway slave who was converted under him in Rome) back to his owner, Philemon. Paul wrote Philemon, who was also one of his converts, to request that he receive Onesimus without repercussions, as a brother in the Lord.**
- 15) Regarding Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon:
- a) According to Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Philippians 1:7, 13-14, 17; Colossians 4:3, 10, 18; and Philemon 9-10, 13, 23, what was Paul's situation when he wrote these epistles? **They all mention Paul's chains, being guarded, or being a prisoner. All were written while Paul was in prison. Traditionally, these are dated during Paul's Roman imprisonment from 60-62 AD. (Some consideration has been given to slightly earlier writing dates based on the possibility they were penned during Paul's Ephesian or Caesarean imprisonment.)**
 - b) Based upon Ephesians 6:21-22, Colossians 4:7-9, and Philemon 10-12, what do these three epistles have in common? **Apparently, all three letters were being carried to their recipients by Tychicus at the same time. Presumably then, Paul also wrote all three at about the same time. Tychicus was to give the recipients of Ephesians and Colossians a fuller report of Paul's circumstances in person. Colossians mentions that Onesimus (about whom Paul wrote to Philemon) was accompanying Tychicus.**
 - c) Review what Paul says about himself in Philemon 9. From these four letters, what impresses you most about Paul and how will you plan to emulate him? **In Philemon 9, Paul called himself "an old man and now also a prisoner." Personal sharing**