

# Paul's Prison Epistles

LESSON  
ONE

## Paul's Imprisonment Discussion Forum



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MINISTRIES

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# Paul's Prison Epistles

## Lesson One: Paul's Imprisonment

### Discussion Forum

With  
Dr. Reggie Kidd

Students  
Chris Attaway  
Wes Sumrall

#### Question 1:

**Does the book of Acts contain a factual account of Paul's life?**

**Student:** Does the book of Acts contain a factual account of Paul's life?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Wes, one of the great things about the two volumes Luke and Acts, is that Luke tells us that he goes through a pretty elaborate research process to tell us what he knows. In the Gospel According to Luke, he talks about going back and talking with the eyewitnesses and making sure that he gets the story right. In the case of Acts, when we get around to his account of Paul's life we have the extra added advantage of knowing that he was Paul's traveling companion. By 2 Timothy, the last thing that Paul wrote is we know that Luke was the one man that stayed with Paul all the way through his ministry. So, as you read through Luke's account in Acts we find that there are these really nice touches of his own personal knowledge of what was going on. He is able to tell us for instance that it was one of Paul's nephews that let Paul know about the conspiracy to kill him while he was in prison in Jerusalem. Time after time, archeologists found the book of Acts being confirmed by archeological discoveries. And, there is this sense that we have as you read the book of Acts that whoever wrote this knew what he was talking about.

When Paul talks in 2 Corinthians 5 about us standing before the "Bema", the Judgment Seat of Christ, we know that he had in mind the bema or the judgment seat that the Roman Governor sat on in Corinth and archeologists have found that. Luke describes Gallio, the governor sitting on that bema when Paul is dragged before him in Acts 18. For the longest time, interpreters just scratched their heads over Paul mentioning this special office in Ephesus called Asiarch, which means "ruler of Asia". It wasn't until the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when they started excavating Ephesus that they found inscriptions for the first time of this office of the Asiarchs. And, then as Ephesus was excavated they started finding all these inscriptions with magical formulas and amulets and until that time, we would read these passages where Paul has these confrontations with the magicians in Ephesus and not know exactly what he was talking about. But as the archeologists unearthed these things, we started to realize that Ephesus and that whole region had a lot of magical speculations. So, the Gospel According to Luke and the book of Acts overtime have just shown themselves to be full of more and more reason to trust them because of

what we have found among archeologists. Not to mention, the whole Christian persuasion is that God didn't just do, he explained. He used the unique personalities and individuals that he had gifted in order to tell us what he had done and interpret them for us. And we are so grateful that God gave this particular guy, Luke, the special relationship that he had with Paul.

### **Question 2:**

#### **Why did Paul participate in Jewish rituals in Jerusalem?**

**Student:** Paul thought it would compromise the gospel if Titus was circumcised. If this is true by what reasoning did Paul think it was okay for him to participate in the rituals in Jerusalem?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Paul being a Jew had absolutely no problem carrying over Jewish observance for himself. Titus was a Gentile and it was important for Paul to communicate that when a person became a child of God, son of Abraham with Jesus as an elder brother by faith, they did not have to become a Jew in order to have that relationship. So, if he felt that there was a really important principle at stake, in making it clear that Titus the Gentile did not have to get circumcised. But as far as himself carrying on the continuity of the form of worship of his forebearers, he felt God had given these traditions to the Jewish people. And they were a way for them to love him, to serve him, to celebrate their peoplehood under God and now in Christ. So, he felt that he could participate in these traditions himself.

### **Question 3:**

#### **How should we view traditions that aren't required by Scripture?**

**Student:** In another part of Acts, Paul takes what looks like a "Nazirite Vow". Talking about traditions, what traditions can we maintain today even if they aren't significant and at what point do we forgo traditions for the sake of the gospel?

**Dr. Kidd:** That's a great combined question about Paul and Jewish practice, and us and traditional practices for the church. Let's start with Paul's vow. I think what you are referring to is in Chapter 18, where it says he cut his hair at Cenchrea because he had taken a vow. It looks a lot like a Nazirite vow from Numbers 6. Now, in a formal Nazirite vow you would have to make a sin offering as well. I think it's really interesting that Luke doesn't tell us everything that he possibly could about this. And I think that we can assume that for Paul, like the writer to the Hebrews, one sacrifice had been offered, done. And if Paul is doing a Nazirite vow and what's interesting is that the text doesn't tell us straightforwardly that it's a Nazirite vow; it's just a vow. But if it's done kind of as a trajectory of a Nazirite vow, I think it's safe to assume that Paul would not have offered a blood sacrifice of some animal that doesn't do anything anymore. I think he would think that's totally inappropriate.

Nonetheless, as a Jew, he has this whole rich sense of thank offerings and free-will offerings that the redeemed would offer as just part of their relationship with the Lord. So, I think he would probably make some adjustments on the basis of the finished work of Christ but still feel it would be culturally appropriate to make a vow to the Lord.

Similarly, you have him being willing as an act of, if you will, second mile charity in Acts 21, when right after he has made this presentation of the offering from the Gentiles for the Jewish poor, a symbol of the unity of Jew and Gentile, which Paul talks a lot about in his letters but Luke doesn't tell us much about it at all. It just says the offering is made and all of the sudden the Christian leaders in Jerusalem are very concerned that Paul's being misunderstood as teaching that Jews do not have to keep the customs of Moses so they ask him if he will finance and support these four men who have made vows in the temple. And, Paul is willing to do that. I think that is expressive of how much Paul really wants Jews to get it, even though he knows that God has called him to minister to the Gentiles. So, Paul gives us a great sense of disciplined ability to step into traditions when they don't violate the gospel and use them to communicate the love of God in Christ. And, I think that's the posture we have to take with Christian traditions as well. When they serve the gospel, we can receive what the church before us has done when they're not against Scripture. But times may come when we have to move in a different direction again within the bounds of Scripture.

As I'm talking, I find myself thinking about Martin Luther. When he came along, he really wanted people to understand that what God had done for us in Christ was the most amazing thing. And he looked at the worship service that the Roman Catholic Church had developed, and he felt that it needed to be stood on its head because as it was received, and as it had developed, it was all about men reoffering Christ on the altar. And he felt like that was totally inappropriate and so he replaced all the language of us offering a gift to God to a celebration of God offering a gift to us. But he left the basic structure of the service intact. It moved from glorifying God, to confession, to the reading of Scripture, to reciting creeds, to the proclamation of the Word, then to coming to the table to celebrate what the Lord had done. And he felt that it was important to leave the traditional shape in place so that people don't get distracted by all kinds of change that isn't really central to the gospel so that the sermon could be the place where the gospel could be preached and then could be used to lean into a table that itself preached the gospel. And I think that's just a great example for us as heralds of the gospel to be able to receive what's good and to change and adjust it as we need to.

### Question 4:

#### Should we observe church seasons like Advent and Lent?

**Student:** This brings up a question of things that are going on in the church today like an Advent or a Lent. How would you address those in relation to what Martin Luther said and what Paul was going through in his day?

**Dr. Kidd:** Those are great examples of places where historically the church has, in the spirit of the fact that God wanted to shape our sense of time as we come out of the Old Testament and with now, the cross being the center of time. Over time, the church developed a means of preparation for the celebration of his coming in Advent and then a time of preparation for the crucifixion and resurrection at Lent to help tell the story. And I think there is great gospel freedom in being able to use those periods of time as long as they are helping to tell the story. But when they become themselves sort of objects of worship and things that you just can't adjust or tweak, then I think you have to wonder whether there is some sort of subtle idolatry that's going on.

The thought is attributed to Luther; it says something along these lines: There is no New Testament book of Leviticus, that is there is no type prescription of exactly how to shape time, of exactly what we have to do to worship but there is a clear message and there is a clear pattern of Word and table that celebrates the sacrifice of Christ for us. And the patterns of God's people gathering to praise and pray to the Lord. And given those broad parameters, gives the specific teaching of the gospel a lot of freedom to figure out exactly what that would do. And the responsibility not to come under the dominion, say in Colossians 2, of new moons, Sabbaths, and feasts that would bind our consciences nonetheless the opportunity to let the Lord shape our sense of time as we tell the gospel story through the church year.

### Question 5:

#### Why did Paul wait to assert his rights as a Roman citizen?

**Student:** If Paul was a Roman citizen, how come in all this trouble bounding around from prison to prison, why didn't he assert his rights as a Roman citizen sooner? It seems it would have saved him a lot of headache and maybe even would have made his ministry more effective.

**Dr. Kidd:** I think a really interesting thing goes on with Paul. He really believes that the gospel is to the Jew first and then to the Gentile or the Greek. And the way that that works itself out is that he wants to take the message to Jews first and he would love to see Jews get converted and then join him to go to Gentiles. But he realizes pretty soon that he is meeting really stiff opposition. In the first missionary journey, it's a Roman governor who happens to share one of his names, Paulus who bails him out. And I think it's then that he starts reflecting on the potential of his own Roman

citizenship to help keep doors open that Jewish opposition is going to close. And that really comes to a head when he is in jail, in Acts 16.

Again, what he has wanted and what he has done in Philippi is he has gone to the prayer place that's by the side of the river to speak to the Jewish audience first. He winds up in jail because he exorcises a demon from this girl and then they are going to start to abuse him. He wants to keep the ministry going, so he appeals to his Roman citizenship to help him at that point. Later on, he appeals to his Roman citizenship to get an audience with the Roman Caesar. And I think we get this sense of him figuring out how his Roman citizenship can play into his call to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

So, you then have a picture of a robust sense of self that's a gift in Christ where he can see himself as being, for the sake of the gospel, a steward of that part of him that's being a Roman citizen. Just like he sees himself being a steward of that part of himself which is: Hebrew of Hebrews, trained at the feet of Gamaliel. Or that aspect of who he is, that is a citizen of Tarsus, a no mean city. And it's like he becomes more alive to all these cultural forces that have made him who he is, so that each one of them can be a means for him to better understand, better embed himself, better embody the gospel in whatever setting he's in.

### Question 6:

#### Why did Rome allow Paul to teach about Christ?

**Student:** It's curious to me that in the Roman setting, why they would allow him to teach the things he did for so long. Do you have any thoughts? We asked that he seemed at times to wait to bring his Roman citizenship forth, but at the same time, from a Roman standpoint, they seem to allow him to teach it where he was, in prison or out.

**Dr. Kidd:** Paul is walking a really fine line. On the one hand, he is proclaiming that there is a new Lord and that every knee will eventually bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, not pagan idols, not Caesar and in Thessalonica, he is charged with proclaiming that there is another king besides Caesar. And at the same time, he is talking about this one who in John's gospel said, "My kingdom is not of this world." He is about a much more subtle kingdom development, a commonwealth, that he says in Philippians 3 is a commonwealth that is in heaven. A king that is in Heaven, who calls us to worship, glorify and serve him. But that doesn't pull us out of our obligations of citizenship, our obligations of family, our obligations in the marketplace.

It's hard to say exactly why the Romans let him proclaim as long as they did. It's clear that his fellow Jews understood that he was calling for such a major adjustment to their own theology by bringing Jesus into the Godhead and by saying that the



world to come has already in some respect begun in Jesus' resurrection. And that now is the time when the nations would be blessed, only now through Jesus Messiah and they were not ready to go there. They understood where he was going and they were saying, "Uh-uh, no way." But I think it would be fairly typical for the Romans to give as much ground as possible. What they did was to go into a culture and they would conquer the people militarily but they try to leave them alone as much as they can, as far as their own worship practices and their own philosophies. So, they would have to sense a distinct definite military threat before they are going to shut somebody down. And that's why the Roman governor in Acts 18, Gallio, who is the brother of Seneca, who was Nero's teacher, when he is presented with Paul as a problem by the Jews he just says, "No that's something for you all to work out; Rome has no interest in shutting this guy down."

### Question 7:

#### What does it mean to be all things to all people?

**Student:** Reggie, Paul speaks about becoming all things to all people. Discuss how that works out in the life of a minister today, as far as, do we become all things? Are we devoid of culture ourselves or do we become like the culture that we're ministering to?

**Dr. Kidd:** That's a great question, Chris. I think it's really helpful to remember how full of what cultures had made and shaped what Paul was. We talked a little while ago about the fact that he is a Roman citizen. He talks about that he is a citizen of Tarsus and when he says that he says it like with his chest puffed out, "a city of no mean standing." And when talks about his Roman citizenship he was asked, "Did you buy your Roman citizenship?" And he replies, "I was born to my Roman citizenship," and he talks about the fact that he was trained at the feet of Gamaliel, as far as we know, one of the if not the preeminent teachers of his time. And, when Paul talks about becoming all things to all men he's not talking about the sort of shriveling up of who he is, like using an eraser to get rid of everything that is Paul. In 1 Corinthians 9, when he says that he has just been talking about the need for people to love and to use positions of authority for the sake of other people, not for their own self-aggrandizement. He has talked in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians about the fact that because we belong to Christ we're slaves of no men. We're bought with a price so we are slaves of nobody. But what that means is the slave becomes the Lord's freed man and it's a sense of dignity and family that they never had.

Conversely, the person who was free becomes a slave of Christ and that when Paul thinks about himself, he thinks about a person who is free, who's advantaged in all kinds of ways: Roman citizens, citizen of Tarsus, Hebrew of Hebrews. And he's thinking about his own responsibility, not to base his self-worth on those sources of identity but to see them as means and opportunities to serve other people. And so that means there is sort of an emptying of self but it's not an erasing of self, it's a seeing

myself of being a steward of this identity so that my Roman-ness can be there for you, my Jewish-ness can be there for you, my Tarsian-ness can be there for you. And so, the challenge for ministers is to really own the good things that have made us who we are, our upbringing, our education, the good things in our lives and the bad things in our lives. Some things that put us more in touch with the glory of Jesus and things that put us in touch with the sufferings of Jesus and see those as being means and opportunities to build deeper relationships with people.

### **Question 8:**

**Should we engage foreign cultures or work mainly with cultures we already know?**

**Student:** It seems like Paul used the area of culture he was experienced in. How far should we go in terms of bringing all things to all people and exploring cultures that we don't really have any experience in? Should we do that or should we pretty much stick to our guns and do what we know?

**Dr. Kidd:** That becomes a matter of calling. For some of us it means really owning where we are and serving there. For other people, it means recognizing that there are people who are outside of my comfort zone, that my belonging to Christ calls me to go into their world knowing that I'm not the sum of my cultural influences but I am God's. And some of us our gifted in such a way as to be able to go into another culture and adapt, learn a language, and learn a whole other way of being precisely because we belong to Christ. But I don't think that you can answer that question apart from this mysterious thing that the Lord does inside a person.

The point though is to do this out of a position of strength of knowing who you are in Christ. And I think the more we get to know the Lord and are able to be thankful for who he has made us to be, and to not take our bearings from the world around us for getting our own ego needs made and having our identities built up. Then we can ask the question well, "Lord, do you want me to stay here and use all of this to serve you or are you calling me, as you have called men and women for centuries, to go out of this land into some other land so others can hear the good news and see you build them into new images of God?"

### **Question 9:**

**When should the church require Christians to conform to its own culture?**

**Student:** On the other side, at what point does the church say to those who are coming in and are not a part of their culture that this is how we do things here you are invited to come and be a part but this is how we do things?

**Dr. Kidd:** That's a great question too. I think the Lord gifts individuals and he also gifts congregations or communities. He plants certain gift mixes in them. You know, some churches are going to be stronger at teaching preaching, some churches are going to be stronger in mercy-ministry, some churches are going to have people with a gift and a knack for high-culture expression, and some churches are going to be gifted with people who have a knack for lower culture expression, folk music kind of things or more pop, more engaged with whatever is happening out there. And the wise congregation assesses, here is what we do well and says, "We are going to do what we do well as well as we can do it." But the wise congregation also says, "Did you know this is going to be a sort of porous circle we put around ourselves and there may very well be people who are gifted differently than we are who add more into this great jambalaya of kingdom life?"

And it is necessary that we keep the mentality of ever wanting our walls to expand to include more to have a greater expression of what the body of Christ can be. So, it means taking stock of your gifts, doing them well and being ready to accommodate people who come with different gifts of things and different visions of ministry. I've seen this in churches that just have this very generous attitude of having a security of being able to do well what they do well but not say, "Well, this is the way we do it and if you want to do it another way then there's another church down the street," but, "If you feel really connected to us, if you sense the spirit of God here and there's something that you can bring that we don't have, please help us become more of what the body of Christ can be."

### Question 10:

#### Why do Christians have to suffer?

**Student:** Reggie, throughout the New Testament it seems there is a consistent paradigm of suffering as the norm for the Christian life. Why is it that God has called his believers to suffer? Didn't Christ already suffer for us?

**Dr. Kidd:** He did suffer for us and now he suffers in and through us. The whole point is for us to be conformed to the image of the Son and there is a fellowship of his sufferings. You know, God could have just made it so that there was no fall and it would have been glorious. But somehow, he wanted a deal where at the very end there would be a higher glory for his creation going through the awfulness of exploding and then being put back together again. And the Redeemer, the eternal second person of the trinity always glorious, always in perfect fellowship and communion with the Father, always worthy of worship just because of who he is, will by virtue of his humiliation and exaltation, glorification, have — it seems ridiculous even try to say it, but a greater glory, a greater honor, a greater worthiness for being Redeemer. And the honor of belonging to him is that we don't just get a stamp that gets us out of Hell; we get that but we are called to know ourselves what it is to be refashioned and remade and to know him in a way that we wouldn't know him if we

didn't suffer and didn't know him in the midst of our sufferings. So, there is just a greater depth that is built into us by virtue of knowing him, knowing that side of him in the midst of suffering.

### Question 11:

#### Why did Paul associate suffering with victory in spiritual war?

**Student:** Now, it seems that Paul often equates suffering with winning in spiritual warfare. And I know when I have been in times of suffering, it seems like I'm losing. How do you relate that?

**Dr. Kidd:** It's a hard thing to talk about from outside; it's something that we have to walk through. The old spiritual gets it kind of wrong, "Jesus walks this lonesome valley. He had to walk it by himself and nobody else could walk in for him; he had to walk it by himself." You have to walk this lonesome valley, you have to walk it by yourself; nobody can walk it for you. You have to walk it alone. No, no, no. In the valley of suffering, Christ did walk it alone but we don't walk it alone. And, something happens in that valley where either you flip a switch and know that you're not alone or you really are alone.

I saw this with my dad. My dad slid into senile dementia and it was just a horrible thing to watch this man, who was an educator, who his whole value was what he knew, what he remembered, and what he could communicate and just losing that. But he had always been just too smart for Jesus, that God reduced him to this child-like simplicity so he could finally get what happened on the cross was for him. And that he needed to know that his sins were forgiven, and it wasn't about him being good, wasn't about him just being him; he needed a Savior. And I saw my dad have this sense that somebody came into his bubble of pain. And he asked him to come with him and so his death was no longer this really lonely thing. It was knowing that somebody was with him. And that's a really glorious thing and... In the place of suffering, there is a knowing of him that just doesn't happen apart from going into that really hard place.

**Student:** That's a great answer; that's a great story.

**Dr. Kidd:** I wish I wasn't becoming such an expert at it myself. But really I don't know what your guys' experiences are, but it's mine. The times that I hate, where finances are upside down, relationships are not what they want to be. The times that I look at the Psalms that call down curses on your enemies, and I'm going, "Yeah. I get it. Lord get him!" Those are the very times when the Lord just becomes more real. And I don't know why... Well, I think I do know why it has to be that way; it's because as broken sinners he wants us to understand that it's his pleasure to be with us. He stirred himself up and came after us when we were lost and his whole design is to pull us up and remake us, and to give us a life with him that is constituted by

gratitude and not guilt, by hope and not despair, by friendship instead of aloneness. And, the only way that he can get our attention is “bang!” and hit us over the head, so that we are looking at him and not our circumstances and not the situation we are in.

### Question 12:

#### Did Paul write all the prison epistles attributed to him?

**Student:** Reggie, we have all heard and read some people who question the authorship of Paul in the letters that are attributed to him, especially some of the prison epistles. How can we be sure that he wrote those letters?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Chris, in the series that we are working on here, the Prison Epistles, there are really only two letters that are in dispute: Colossians and Ephesians. And the kinds of things that scholars have observed... There are a lot of things but really there are two that are at the center of it. One is that the language is a little smoother and a little more flowing, a little more exalted and along with that, the ideas, the description of Christ and of the church is a bit more exalted. I think there are some things to realize.

First, in the letter to the Philippians, which is in this series that Paul wrote around the same time in prison, Paul pretty much puts an end to the law of circumcision debate. In the process, he finds himself meditating in Philippians 2 on this larger picture of Christ. It's always been there but he has this opportunity in talking with the Philippians about the one who was always in the form of God but didn't consider equality with God something to hold on to but emptied himself and came for us and, becoming identified with us, not just as man but as criminal and because of that God highly exalted him and set him up above every name. He made it so that every knee would bow and every tongue confess. And I think Paul himself has found himself thinking about this larger sense of who Christ is.

Meanwhile, people in Colossae have come under the impress of some teachers who have some rival beings and they are teaching in such a way as to challenge Christ's lordship, Christ's glory, and the honor of that's due his name. And they are suggesting that there are other beings that ought to get veneration right alongside Christ. And that combination of Paul putting an end to the law of circumcision debate in the letter to the Philippians and his thinking about a more cosmic universal lordship aspect of who Christ is and then finding this pastoral situation in where he finds the need to explain to the Colossians that there is no rival to Jesus. He is the Lord of all those supposed lords. He is the power who made all the principalities and dominions. And I think that has just led him very naturally to a more exalted kind of expression, and then it's led him in the letter to the Ephesians to talk about what flows from Christ's cosmic lordship. It's the role of the church as his bride, as this worldwide people that is the place where his life gets embodied.

And what is really interesting in Ephesians is he is not so much making his case as much as he is praying his case. For the first three chapters in Ephesians, he is praying and he keeps interrupting himself to do a little teaching. But basically what he is doing is asking that the Lord would open the eyes of believers' hearts so that they would know the power that's theirs and they would know the place that is theirs. Paul talks about bowing his knee before the Father, from who every family on Heaven and earth has received its name, that we might be rooted and grounded in the incredible love that has been poured out upon us. And then he winds up talking about the spiritual warfare that we are called to, a warfare that is basically of prayer. That's not just arguing the case to the nations, not just going in a proclaiming, but being on our knees and asking the Lord to do what only he can do.

So, I think it's just kind of the narrowest perspectives that insist, well Paul can only express himself the way he does in Galatians and 1 Corinthians and Romans. And fail to see how adaptable his mind is and his heart and his spirit are to actual needs of people in real congregations. And the way that his view of Christ is just so big and so rich that there is always more of who he is to unpack. I think at the end of the day, everybody just has to read the whole corpus and take Colossians and Ephesians and see, like, well who else could have written this, except Paul the apostle?

**Student:** And it seems that they are not allowing him to do what we do every day, and that is writing differently about different topics under different circumstances?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yes, C.S. Lewis has a famous little essay that he writes about his critics and how these critics thought that this one essay he wrote was the best thing he ever wrote that he must have just poured himself into, and this other piece they thought was just trash and that Lewis was just having a bad day. And the reality was just the opposite. The one that he just kind of ripped out without really thinking about it was the one they thought was so deep and the one that he had sweated over was the one the critics didn't care for. So, it's just hard to decide ahead of time what a guy can or can't say. And like you said, to deny him the flexibility and the adaptability and the heart concern to speak to people where they really are about the issues that are on their hearts just doesn't make much sense.

### Question 13:

#### Why is Paul's personal letter to Philemon in the Bible?

**Student:** Reggie, how is it that a personal letter like Philemon made it into the New Testament canon? It seems a bit out of place and maybe trivial and I'm not sure what bearing that has on my understanding of the criteria for a book to make it into the Canon.

**Dr. Kidd:** I think the presence of Philemon is the perfect embodiment of the whole incarnation principle. Jesus didn't come just to save abstractions, he came to save to

save people; he came to redeem difficult relationships and difficult people. I think Philemon is just a treasure because if we didn't have it all we would have from Paul on masters and servants would be Colossians and Ephesians: servants obey; masters take care of your slaves. But, what we get in Philemon is a window into a relationship; we get a window into the way Paul expected people to work it out. We see Paul respecting the freedom and the liberty of the owner and the responsibility to make the right decision. And he doesn't even tell them what the decision has to be but he just sort of hems him in by surrounding him with all this great theological and personal considerations. And he talks and he has these wonderful wordplays about the change of identity in Onesimus, whose name means "beneficial". But, who before he knew Christ was worthless and now in Christ, he is worth much. Then he uses wordplay to challenge Philemon to do something useful for him. And he uses a wordplay using the Greek word behind Onesimus' name. He just expresses all kinds of confidence in Philemon that he is going to do the right thing. And do it out of love not out of dry duty and obligation.

So, why would this be the in the Canon? Well, it's because the Lord comes to redeem people and to take difficult relationships and situations and to make them new. I think we all need to take Philemon much more to heart and learn from it. That all the principles and the instructions and decrees that were given from Paul, we're expected to work out by the spirit of Christ in wisdom and humility and graciousness. So, I am so glad it's there.

### Question 14:

#### Did Paul's imprisonment damage his respectability?

**Student:** Reggie, as we have talked about these letters Paul has written in prison. What comes to mind for me is, did that have any consequence to respectability being that he was a man in prison?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Jews have a long history of the glory of martyrdom and one of the great things about the Jewish worldview is because it starts with creation and then a fall. And there is a sense of it's not necessarily the case that those who are high and exalted ought to be high and exalted. And it's not necessarily the case that those who are down in the dirt really deserve to be there. The Jewish theology has always been about, what God is going to do to reverse the evil that is here and martyrs. The Old Testament is full of people who die in order to tell the story of who God really is and especially in the inter-testamental period when the Greeks and Romans come in and take over. Even Greek and Roman theology, or Greek and Roman thinking, is aware of the noble teacher who is wrongly accused and put in prison or even executed. Socrates was forced to drink the hemlock. Seneca, who was Nero's teacher, winds up in a conspiracy to kill Nero when Nero goes bad, and he is forced to commit suicide. Socrates only gains esteem from having to drink the hemlock. Seneca, his voice is only amplified by virtue of his having to commit suicide. Musonius Rufus, who was

Epictetus' teacher, he was forced into exile. Dio Chrysostom, who was a young contemporary of Paul, he's forced into exile during his travels. It's almost like he is more famous for being sent into exile and that sort of gives him an authority, a man of, if you will, a Greek or Roman man of sorrows.

So, the fact that Paul writes from prison does not necessarily take away from his authority to speak. And you get that sense from Paul himself, "I am in prison, but does that mean the gospel is in prison? No." In Philippians he talks about "People out there are preaching the gospel because they think they're going to make it worse on me? Just let them go because the gospel is still going out, and that's all I care about." Especially, knowing that in Jesus Christ, Satan's best shot, trying to take out the second person of the trinity, winds up being the very means for the redemption of the human race. You know that Paul would have the sensibility that all this stuff is only enhancing my power and the power especially of my gospel.

### Question 15:

**Which cornerstone of Paul's teaching is most lacking in the modern church?**

**Student: Reggie, in the lesson, you talk about three cornerstones of Paul's teaching in his epistles: Christ's royal sovereignty, his honor, and his determination to return in the future. Which of these is most lacking in contemporary evangelicalism today and what is the impact of this lack of emphasis?**

**Dr. Kidd:** Which one is most lacking? What we are really missing is the robust sense of that they really go together. I mean, there are some churches that are all over Christ's sovereignty and it's: preach doctrine, preach doctrine, preach doctrine. And there are other churches that are about glory and honor, and worshipping him whether it's in that more dignified way or whether it's in a more happening way. But, it's all about getting the worship right and often it gets disconnected from the one that we are worshipping and winds up being all about the worship itself. And, then there are churches that are so focused on Christ's determination to come back that all you hear about is that he is coming back. And the whole notion of his being preeminent and his being sovereign now and the responsibility to pray for his kingdom to come on this earth and that his will be done here on earth as it is in Heaven and to ask the question about what we do with that in the here and now is kind of missing. So, what I'm missing is any one of those, what I am missing is those of us who are really into Christ sovereignty to understand the majesty and the need to worship this one and to love him with all of our heart and our affection along with the proclamation of the doctrine and then to live boldly and robustly now in anticipation of his return and for all these things really to be working together.



**Question 16:****What is union with Christ, and why is it important?**

**Student:** Reggie, this theme of union with Christ seems to be the most abstract theme in our lesson. I would like to ask, how does this union occur and why is it so important?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Chris, personally, I think the reason it can seem abstract is because of something Paul says. He says, "Our life is hidden with Christ." This life is very much a life by faith, and so it can seem like awfully out there and awfully remote. For me, one of the ways — and I think Paul would resonate with this — one of the ways that becomes more concrete, is remembering my baptism. My baptism is the place in my life where I took my place in the death and resurrection of Christ. The waters came over me and the people God were around me and I knew that his life was mine; his death was mine. And I think the realization and that union with Christ, like his life for mine, his life in me, his death in me, and my death in him, I think the reason God gave us something like that baptism is so that we would have an anchor in our experience to remember what it is, to come into this relationship with himself.

In my particular tradition, we use the language of "improving our baptism" by meditating on it, by seeking to walk with him, and in him, every day confessing our sin and giving gratitude for his presence in our lives and in hope that's ours as well. And it becomes less abstract when I choose to let each day's death be a death that he shares with me and when I chose to let each day's victory be a foretaste of the glory and a kiss of his love. And, how does it happen? I just think that's what the ministry of the Holy Spirit is. And there is this great exchange that goes on in Christ's ministry to us.

He talks in that section of John's gospel, John 13–17 where he is giving the disciples instructions and giving them this teaching that is preparing them for his leaving. He says, (paraphrase) "I am not going to leave you as orphans. I am going to send a paraclete so that I won't just be alongside you, I will be in you. And you will be able to do greater works than I have done here on this earth," and a lot of that has to do with his life not just being out there but his life being in us. So, I think it becomes less abstract when we remember the concrete place in our lives at our baptisms, where his life got connected to us. It has to do with each day seeking to remember and improve our baptism by letting each day being a conscious walking in his death and his resurrection and having this confident reliance on the Holy Spirit to make Christ present to us.

**Student:** So, that confidence of knowing that the Holy Spirit's doing that and is walking with us maybe why it matters as well? That we are not doing those things alone but we are in union and that's a proof positive of it.

**Dr. Kidd:** That's the great thing about the faith is that this isn't just a book with instructions on how to live or just some sort of self-standing philosophical system that we are supposed to go and make happen. It's a story about how God himself has engaged in our lives, so that Paul can say, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling," but he can do that because he knows it's God that is in work within us to will and to obey. And God is about living in us and among us, and knowing that God is a thousand times more interested in getting you to glory and making you over in the image of Christ than you ever are. And he has set promises in motion on your behalf; he has put his own onboard computer, his own GPS in you, his own mind, the mind of Christ in you. That it is just beyond anything that you ultimately have to control; it's his life in you and your life in him.

### Question 17:

#### Who should benefit from our good works?

**Student:** Christians are saved to do good works but the good works that we're called to do, are they to benefit just the community of faith or the wider world?

**Dr. Kidd:** I think there are a range of consideration that you bring up, in the first place Paul says, "Do good to all, especially the household of faith." And he's going to close out his writing in Titus 3, which he writes along with 1 and 2 Timothy, which is the last thing he wrote, by talking about the need, not just to obey governing authorities but to be ready for every good work and that would mean in the political arena, the economic arena, wherever we are called to live and serve. There is this sense in the New Testament, beginning with Jesus' command to love one another the way Christ has loved you and that there is this sort of focus love for the neighbor in the brotherhood where Christ has most intensely identified himself that we are called to be a place where the world can look and say, "Oh look, they really are his disciples." And as he prays in John 17 that we love one another and that the world will know that the Father sent the Son and to see an intimacy among us that is reflective of the intimacy of the Father and the Son, and yet we do that so that others will see. And as God works in them, will say, "I want a piece of that; I want in on that." Even in our having this sense of inward fellowship and intense love of ourselves, it is for the sake of, as Francis Schaeffer used to say, a "watching world" who doesn't know what love is, who doesn't know what purity is, who doesn't know what deference is, who doesn't know what truthfulness is.

So, even our love for one another, it is for the sake of the world and then Paul talks about doing things...the church having good repute in the community and the church doing things that acknowledge that which is good and that which is true and that which is noble and that which is worthy of honor that even the world knows and understands. They are supposed to be able to look at us and see, "Oh, that's what it is to be a human being. Oh that's what it is to live in community, and that's what it is to

know the God that made us.” So, it’s good works. We’re made in Christ’s image. We are his workmanship, to love and serve each other and to love and serve the world.

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**Dr. Reggie Kidd (Host)** is Professor of New Testament Emeritus at Reformed Theological Seminary. He received his M.A.R. and M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. in Christian Origins from Duke University. He is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society and is an ordained priest in The Episcopal Church. Dr. Kidd teaches at the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies and has served as a pastor and elder at multiple churches. He is the author of *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (BakerBooks, 2005) and has contributed to many other publications, including *The Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (Zondervan, 2003) and *The Reformation Study Bible* (Ligonier Ministries, 2005).