



# PAULINE PRISON EPISTLES



Joel Guido

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**AIM INSTITUTE**  
**PAULINE PRISON EPISTLES**  
**Study Guide**

**COURSE:** Pauline Prison Epistles

**Course Term:** Weekly Zoom Debriefs begin September 5 at 7:00 PM (US Eastern Standard Time) for 12 weeks (no class on September 27).

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Welcome to the prison epistles of Paul. This class is a survey of the letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. We will look at background and history and study the underlying themes in these four epistles. (A detailed introduction to the New Testament is given in our “Synoptic Gospels” course.) Ten themes, some of which overlap into more than one letter will be examined.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Our goal will be to understand more deeply the message God wants us to understand in context through these epistles.
- Read through each book at least once. A plan for reading each book twenty-two times (six chapters a day) during the course period will be available in the Study Guide.
- To be able to map out an outline of an epistle, as well as identity and trace its major themes.

**INSTRUCTOR: Joel Guido**

Joel grew up as the son of missionaries in Cuenca, Ecuador, which played a significant role in shaping his worldview and passion for serving others. As a missionary himself since 2015, Joel has dedicated several years to serving the community in Ecuador. As an elder in the local church, he is responsible for overseeing various aspects of the church's ministry, and more importantly, for shepherding the souls of the local church body. He currently supervises youth and high school home groups, Sunday school, and the multimedia team, and helps to run the day-to-day operations of the church.

Joel is a nurse by vocation and is driven by a desire to provide healthcare to those in need, especially in a missionary context. Additionally, the recent process of pursuing his

master's degree in religion with a focus on church administration has deepened his understanding of theological principles and enhanced his leadership skills within the church community.

Finally, Joel's wife and three daughters are an essential part of his life and ministry. Overall, Joel's unique combination of experiences, including his background as a missionary kid, nursing vocation, and theological education, makes him a compassionate and well-rounded leader in his church community, dedicated to glorifying God and leading others toward Him.

### **COURSE FORMAT:**

This directed study format enables you to receive college level instruction while studying at home. (Note, AIM Institute does not offer accredited college credits.) Course elements include:

- Weekly video assignments
- Required textbook reading assignments.
- Contact time with the instructor and classmates by means of a weekly Zoom debrief classroom.
- Study questions are for your personal benefit as well as preparation for the weekly debrief.
- Course will be graded as pass or fail. Bear in mind your weekly preparation will have a direct bearing on how much you gain from the course.

**COURSE VIDEOS:** [CLICK HERE](#)

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

- The first of twelve weekly Zoom Debrief begin on September 5 at 7:00 PM (US Eastern Standard Time) for 12 weeks (no class on September 27).
- You will receive a Zoom invite by email for each debrief.
- Preparation can be done at any time before the debrief.
- To maximize the use of your time, we will not cover information from the videos in the debrief unless there are questions.
- Completion of the course requires a project, a one-page summary of one of the themes which spoke to you personally.
- A complete schedule with weekly assignments will be sent to you after you are registered.

## REQUIREMENTS

- This is an intensive course; students should plan to participate in all class sessions.
- Complete all course reading, watch videos, and writing assignments (approximately one to two hours per week).
- Complete course project: write a one to two page response paper (maximum 1500 words) of what you've learned in this course. This paper is to be submitted prior to the beginning of the last class session. If class size allows, the last class session will be dedicated to a short presentation of these papers by each student.

## TEXT

- *“Encountering the New Testament (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition),”* by Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough (available on Amazon.com, be sure to order the correct edition)
  - Publisher: Baker Academic (2013) ISBN: 978-0-8010-3964-5
  - Hardcover: 430 pages, this textbook will be used for other AIM New Testament survey courses.
  - Pages in the weekly assignments match this edition.

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## September 5 | Session 1 | Orientation and Course Introduction

- Watch video 1
- Orientation and Course Introduction
- Preparation questions: Have you read these Epistles before? Do you know of any theme in one of these Epistles?
- Recommended reading, begin scripture weekly readings

Welcome to The Prison Epistles of Paul.

This class is a survey of the letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. This class may be a little different than most overview classes of the New Testament. Here, I hope to mainly stick to scripture and spend a lot of time in scripture. Yes, we will look at background and history, but I want to go through themes in these four epistles. I also want to encourage each one of you to read each book at least once, but if you are up to the challenge, we can follow the reading plan I placed in your handout that I will be doing along with you. If you do this, you will read through each book a total of 22 times during the time of this class. I understand that this may seem like a lot, but you will never read more than six chapters a day.

Remember, these are letters. When someone gets a letter in the mail, we would read the whole thing. We may go back through it to read a certain section, but one usually starts by reading the whole thing once.

Weekly reading

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Eph 1 - 6 Chapters	Eph 1 Phil 1 - 4 Chapters	Eph 2 Phil 1 Col 1 - 4 Chapters	Eph 3 Phil 2 Col 1 Philem 1	Eph 4 Phil 3 Col 2 Philem 1	Eph 5 Phil 4 Col 3 Philem 1	Eph 6 Col 4 Philem 1

In this class, we will explore ten major themes in the Pauline Epistles. Some of these themes will be present in multiple books, while others will be specific to one book. Our goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the message that God wants us to understand through these Epistles in their original context. There are many other themes that could be covered in this class, but we believe that these ten are the most important. Once you have a good understanding of these ten themes, you will be able to identify other themes in the Epistles on your own.

The videos will present the main idea of each theme and discuss the doctrine associated with it. The application of these themes will be primarily discussed in class meetings in small groups.

- The course curriculum consists of 11 videos, each of which is approximately 20-25 minutes in length. These videos are available for viewing at any time.
- We will be reading one textbook to review the background of each epistle, which will help us understand the context of the time period in which they were written.
- Throughout the 12-week course, we will meet for live Zoom sessions each week to debrief the session with fellow students and the instructor. These sessions will last for approximately one hour.

**September 12 | Session 2 The State of Being Dead in Sin and Rescued by Grace**

**Preparation:**

- Watch Video 2
- Read Colossians 2:12-15; Ephesians 2:1-10, 5:14; Romans 6:1-14



## **Introduction:**

In this session, we will delve into the profound concept of being "dead in sin," exploring the spiritual condition of humanity before embracing faith in Jesus Christ. With a thorough examination of key scriptures, we will uncover the depths of our helplessness and God's remarkable rescue through grace.

## **The State of Spiritual Death:**

Before encountering the transforming power of Christ, all humanity is born into a state of spiritual death. This separation from God arises from inherent sinfulness, resulting in an absence of spiritual life, an inability to align with God's will, and a proclivity toward sinful actions. The writings of Paul, particularly in Ephesians 2, highlight our past state of being "dead in sin" and subject to the dominion of worldly influences.

## **Total Depravity and Helplessness:**

Paul's epistle to the Romans further accentuates our utter helplessness. He portrays humanity as enslaved to sin and controlled by the spirit of the air. This portrayal underscores the direness of our condition—devoid of hope, incapable of self-salvation. Yet, within this bleakness, shines God's love, as seen in Ephesians 2:4b-5a, where we are reminded that even in our wrongdoings, God's love brought us to life in Christ.

## **Acknowledging Our Limitations:**

Understanding the extent of our incapacity to contribute to our salvation is crucial. We didn't die on the cross, live sinlessly, or actively seek Christ. This realization humbles us, redirecting our gratitude toward God who, through His actions, saved us. We can liken this to a rescued person taking credit for their rescue, when in truth, it was the rescuer who accomplished it. Properly grasping our state allows us to accurately glorify God and acknowledge that our rescue is solely due to Him.

## **Correcting Misguided Views:**

Despite our tendencies to rationalize our former state by worldly standards, Scripture offers a multitude of verses illustrating humanity's condition before Christ. These verses serve as a powerful reminder of our inherent depravity and the necessity of divine intervention for salvation.

Jeremiah 17:9	The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick	John 6:44	No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.
Psalms 51:5	Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.	1 Cor 2:14	The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
Genesis 6:5	The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.	Romans 3:23	For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
Psalms 58:3	The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.	Romans 3:10-11	As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.
Romans 8:7	For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.	John 6:65	And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."
Isaiah 64:6	We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.	Romans 7:18	For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.
Romans 5:12	Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned	Jeremiah 13:23	Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.
Ephesians 4:18	They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.	Romans 3:12	All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."
Ecclesiastes 7:20	Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.	Genesis 8:21	And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down

			every living creature as I have done.
John 8:34	Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.	Isaiah 53:6	All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
Psalms 14:3	They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.	Titus 3:3	For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.
Romans 9:16	So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.	Hebrews 11:6	And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him

### **Rescued by Grace:**

Through Christ's sacrificial act, we can receive the salvation He offers. Ephesians 2:4-6, 8-9 emphasizes that our rescue is a result of God's rich mercy and grace, positioning us in Christ Jesus. All glory belongs to God; salvation is not our doing, but His in us.

### **Transition to Dead to Sin:**

Having been saved by grace, we transition to the concept of being "dead to sin." We will explore the spiritual state of believers after embracing faith in Christ and the transformative impact this state brings to our lives.

### **Dead to Sin:**

Paul emphasizes in Romans 6:1-2a that embracing a continued life of sin after receiving grace is incompatible with the new life in Christ. Believers are no longer slaves to sin; instead, they are alive in Christ, liberated from the chains of sin.

### **New Creation and Battling Sin:**

Through the symbolism of burial and resurrection with Christ (Colossians 2:12), believers enter a new creation, empowered by the Holy Spirit to resist sin. While this state isn't one of perfection, believers must engage in an ongoing battle against sin, confessing their wrongdoing for forgiveness and healing.

### **Conclusion:**

As we explore the profound concepts of being "dead in sin" and "rescued by grace," we gain insight into the transformative power of Christ's sacrifice. This understanding humbles us, redirecting our praise to God and igniting a fervent desire to live out our new life in Christ. In the battle against sin, confession and reliance on Christ's grace become paramount. By cultivating a culture of confession within the church, we can collectively experience victory over sin and continue to grow in our spiritual journey.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflecting on the idea that we contribute nothing to our own salvation, how does this perspective reshape the way we view God's grace? How can recognizing our limitations lead to a deeper appreciation of the cross?
2. Considering the shift from being "dead in sin" to being "rescued by grace," how does the concept of "dead to sin" in Romans 6 challenge us to live out our faith? How can we practically apply this understanding to our daily lives, especially when faced with temptations?
3. In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul states that salvation is a gift from God, not the result of our works. How can we avoid falling into the trap of trying to earn our salvation through our actions? How does this understanding impact our approach to spiritual growth?

"Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you." **Ephesians 5:14**

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## **September 19 | Session 3 | Predestined and Chosen in Christ**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 3

- Read Ephesians 1:4-11; John 6:60-70; Philippians 1:18

### **Introduction:**

In this session, we will explore the intricate concept of being "Predestined" and "Chosen in Christ." These ideas, though challenging and sometimes controversial, are central to understanding the role of divine sovereignty in our salvation. Through a careful examination of key Scriptures, we will uncover the profound truth that our redemption is a result of God's intentional choice.

### **Predestined by the Father:**

The concept of predestination can be perplexing, yet its significance is paramount in comprehending how one becomes a Christian. The notion that God's choosing plays a central role in our salvation is exemplified in Paul's writings, particularly in Ephesians 1:4-11. It is crucial to distinguish between the term "chose" and its implications. The discomfort often arises from our limited human understanding and not from the scriptural words themselves.

### **God's Sovereign Choice:**

Scripture reveals that God's choosing extends beyond mere human effort or merit. Just as Paul was chosen while he actively opposed Christianity, we are reminded of Christ's call to His disciples who were found in their ordinary daily activities. John 6:60-70 showcases the significance of Christ's choosing amidst misunderstandings and departures.

### **Reconciling with God's Choice:**

Despite potential doubts or uncertainties, it is essential not to dismiss or evade challenging concepts like predestination. Accepting that God's ways are beyond full comprehension is akin to understanding the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Embracing the truth of being chosen by God requires humility and an acknowledgment that our understanding has limits.

### **Salvation Beyond Offer:**

Ephesians 1:4b underscores that being chosen by God leads to holiness and blamelessness, which constitutes true salvation, not just an offering of the gospel. This distinctiveness sets apart those who are "In Christ" and brings them into a holy relationship with God.

## **A History of Divine Choosing:**

God's act of choosing is evident throughout Scripture, exemplified by Israel's selection as God's treasured people. Accepting that God has chosen His people out of His mercy and love challenges us to view our own election within a broader context.

## **God's Eternal Plan:**

The timing of God's choice is essential to grasp. Before the foundation of the world, God predestined and chose us, showcasing the deliberate nature of our salvation. This divine decision transcends human circumstances and ensures that our salvation cannot be attributed to any created thing, not even ourselves.

## **Ultimate Assurance:**

Understanding our predestination and choice in Christ provides a deep sense of assurance. If God is for us, nothing can stand against us. This truth bolsters our confidence in the sovereignty and purpose of God.

## **Proclaiming Christ:**

In light of these truths, we are called to proclaim Jesus boldly. No matter the circumstances, whether in pretense or truth, the proclamation of Christ should be our constant cause for rejoicing.

## **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. **The Tension Between Divine Sovereignty and Human Understanding:** How do you personally grapple with the concept of predestination and God's choosing? Are there aspects of this teaching that challenge your understanding of God's character or the nature of free will? How can we approach this tension with humility and reverence for God's wisdom?
2. **Embracing God's Unconditional Love and Choice:** In the session, we discussed God's deliberate choice to predestine and choose His people out of His love and mercy. How does recognizing this truth impact your perception of your own relationship with God? How can the assurance of being chosen by God inspire deeper intimacy and trust in Him?

3. The Practical Implications of Chosenness: Ephesians 1:4b highlights that being chosen by God leads to holiness and blamelessness. How does understanding our chosenness affect our daily lives, attitudes, and actions? How does this perspective shape our pursuit of holiness and our interactions with others?
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## **October 3 | Session 4 | In Christ**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 4
- Read Ephesians 1-3, Romans 3:24, 1 Corinthians 1:2, Colossians 1, Philippians 3:1-14

### **Introduction:**

In this session, we delve into the profound concept of being "In Christ." The frequent use of this phrase in Paul's letters, particularly in Ephesians, underscores its significance in shaping our identity and correcting doctrinal understanding. Through a comprehensive examination of key passages, we unravel the depth of this concept and its transformative impact on our lives.

### **The Great Mystery of Being in Christ:**

Paul's extensive use of "In Christ" highlights its centrality to our Christian belief. This terminology emphasizes not merely being followers of Jesus, but being rooted in a profound union with Christ Jesus. This distinction corrects misconceptions and brings into focus God's eternal purpose, unfolding through Christ Jesus.

### **Who We Really Are:**

Being placed "In Christ" establishes a secure identity that transcends doubts and insecurities. By adopting us through Christ's sacrifice, we are granted bold access to God's presence, a privilege once reserved for the high priest. This identity shift eradicates our old self and clothes us with a new identity, marked by the cleansing power of Christ's blood.

### **The True Vine:**

Jesus' declaration in John 14:19-20 foreshadows believers' placement "In Christ" after His resurrection. The analogy of the vine and branches underscores the necessity of remaining in

Christ to bear fruit. As branches are inseparably connected to the vine, we, too, must be in Christ for our thoughts, actions, and values to align with His divine rule.

### **Resisting Worldly Influences:**

Operating "In Christ" means aligning with a new rule that transcends worldly standards. Our transformed identity empowers us to counter cultural norms that contradict God's principles. In all aspects of life, our response is shaped by the truth that we are in Christ, guiding our choices, relationships, and values.

### **Joseph's Example:**

The story of Joseph, revealing his identity to his brothers, mirrors Jesus' declaration of self to Saul. Just as Joseph invited his brothers to come near, Jesus invites us into an intimate relationship. This closeness mirrors the invitation to listen to His word and abide "In Christ," reinforcing the transformative power of this union.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. How does the concept of being "In Christ" influence your understanding of your identity and purpose as a Christian? How does it differentiate from merely following Jesus?
2. In what ways does recognizing our identity "In Christ" impact how we resist and navigate worldly influences? Share examples from your own experiences or observations.
3. Consider the analogy of the vine and branches. How does remaining "In Christ" affect our ability to bear fruit in different aspects of life, such as relationships, work, and personal growth?

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## **October 10 | Session 5 | Incarnation of the Church**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 6
- Read Ephesians 1:22-23, 3:6, 4:4-6, 11-12, 16, 5:21-33, Colossians 1:18-26, John 1:14

### **Introduction:**



In this session, we explore the profound concept of the "Incarnation of the Church." Just as the incarnation of Christ is a cornerstone of our faith, the Church as the body of Christ is a divine reality that calls for our deep understanding and active engagement. By studying key passages and reflecting on their implications, we uncover the transformative nature of this truth.

### **The Incarnation of Christ:**

The incarnation of Christ, a bedrock of the Christian faith, is celebrated at Christmas. It was formally established at the Council of Chalcedon, affirming the dual nature of Christ as fully God and fully man. This unique union of divinity and humanity defines Jesus' nature as 100% man and 100% God, a doctrine crucial to our belief.

### **The Nature of the Church:**

Although the Pauline Epistles don't expound on Christ's nature, they repeatedly emphasize the Church as the body of Christ. Ephesians 5:21-33, often associated with marriage, unveils deeper layers when applied to the Church. Paul's message underscores that Christ is the head of the Church, and the Church is called to submit, be cleansed, nourished, and united in Him.

### **Unity in the Body of Christ:**

The Church, being the body of Christ, calls for unity and cooperation. Just as a body's joints and ligaments contribute to growth, unity among believers propels the Church forward. This unity is marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and love, fostering a living body that carries out the gospel and ministers to one another and the world.

### **Living Out the Incarnation:**

Understanding the Church as the incarnation of Christ transforms our perspective on service and ministry. Just as Jesus said that love for one another distinguishes His disciples, serving within the Church becomes a direct act of serving the body of Christ. Baptism, communion, and other supporting ligaments strengthen the unity and growth of the Church.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. How does comprehending the dual nature of Christ as fully God and fully man impact your understanding of His work and significance for humanity's redemption?

2. Reflect on Ephesians 5:21-33. How does Paul's instruction for husbands and wives also apply to the relationship between Christ and the Church? In what ways does this illuminate the nature of the Church?
  3. Consider the analogy of the Church as the body of Christ. How does this perspective change your approach to service, ministry, and unity within the Church? How does it affect your interactions with fellow believers and the world around you?
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## **October 17 | Session 6 | Unity: The Heart of the Gospel**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 6
- Read Ephesians 4:1-6, 16, 25-27, 31-32; Matthew 6:14-15; Colossians 3:11-15

### **Introduction:**

In this session, we delve into the profound theme of "Unity," a central teaching that resonates beyond the Gospel, touching on family, Christ-like examples, conflicts, and the concept of the Body of Christ. Unity stands as a testimony to the transformative power of the Gospel within us and through us, binding us together as one in Christ.

### **Unity in Christ's Prayer:**

Christ's prayer for unity echoes in John 17:11, desiring believers to be one just as He and the Father are one. Paul's letters, especially in Ephesians, emphasize the importance of unity within the body of believers. This unity is a reflection of the perfect union between the Father, Son, and Spirit.

### **Forgiveness: The Bond of Unity:**

Paul consistently highlights the bond of peace as a crucial element for maintaining unity. Ephesians 4:1-6, 25-27, 31-32 teaches that unity is nurtured through humility, gentleness, patience, and most significantly, forgiveness. Forgiving one another as Christ forgave us becomes the key to fostering and preserving unity among believers.

### **Unified in Christ:**

Colossians 3:11-15 further explores unity by highlighting that in Christ, distinctions such as race, status, or background fade away. Instead, believers are called to be clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, extending forgiveness just as the Lord forgave them.

### **The Work of the Cross:**

Paul explains in Ephesians 2 how Christ, through His sacrifice on the cross, dismantled the barriers that separated Jews and Gentiles. By doing so, He created one new humanity in Him, making peace and reconciling both groups to God.

### **The Call to Forgive:**

Matthew 6:14-15 delivers a solemn warning about the consequences of unforgiveness. Jesus emphasizes that holding onto unforgiveness disrupts the flow of forgiveness from God and disrupts our unity with Him. Forgiveness is an essential expression of God's love and grace that believers must extend to one another.

### **The Impact of Unity:**

Unity isn't merely a theoretical concept; it has practical implications. Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 2:19 reveal that the body of Christ grows and is held together by Christ, supported by each member as they work together in love. Our unity becomes a powerful testimony to the world, showcasing the transformative love of Christ.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on the prayer of Jesus for unity in John 17:11. How does this prayer shape your understanding of unity among believers and its significance in representing the Triune God?
2. Explore Ephesians 4:1-6, 25-27, 31-32. How does forgiveness serve as a foundational element for unity within the Church? How does forgiving others align with the example of Christ's forgiveness?
3. Consider Colossians 3:11-15. How does the removal of distinctions and the practice of virtues contribute to unity in the body of Christ? How can this unity impact your interactions with fellow believers and the world?

4. In what ways have you experienced or witnessed the practical impact of unity within a community of believers? How does unity draw people closer to God's love and transformational power?
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## **October 24 | Session 7 | Living a Life of Christ-Centered Purpose**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 7
- Read James 4:14b; Colossians 3:1-17; Ephesians 4:1-6

### **Introduction:**

In this session, we delve into the profound question posed by James: "What is your life?" This question compels believers to examine their purpose, choices, and actions in the light of their identity in Christ. As we explore Colossians and Ephesians, we discover the transformative power of living as an example of Christ's love and grace.

### **Life: A Fleeting Vapor:**

James 4:14b poignantly reminds us of the fleeting nature of life, comparing it to a vapor that vanishes quickly. Each believer must confront the challenge of defining the purpose and meaning of their individual life, acknowledging its temporal nature.

### **Transformed Living in Christ:**

Colossians 3:1-17 guides believers to shed earthly desires and clothe themselves in Christ-like virtues. The old self is put to death, making way for compassion, kindness, humility, and forgiveness. This transformation arises from being renewed in the image of our Creator.

### **Taking Up the Cross:**

Living out the Gospel requires more than a mere profession of faith; it demands a daily willingness to crucify our old habits and embrace Christ's example. Just as Jesus carried His cross, we are called to die to our selfish desires and follow Him in selfless living.

### **Unified in Christ's Love:**

Colossians 3:12-17 provides a blueprint for unity within the body of Christ. Believers are encouraged to display compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness. The love of Christ binds believers together in perfect harmony, creating an atmosphere of peace and thankfulness.

### **Life Hidden in Christ:**

The answer to James' question about the meaning of life is found in Colossians 3:3-4. Believers' lives are hidden with Christ in God, and as Christ's life is revealed, believers also share in His glory. Our lives find their purpose in Christ, and by living as examples of His love, we bring glory to His name.

### **Pouring Out Love:**

Philippians 2:1-11 offers a powerful example of selflessness through Christ's humility and obedience. Just as Christ humbled Himself for the sake of humanity, believers are called to esteem others, pouring out love and service for the benefit of others.

### **Trusting God in Every Tomorrow:**

Living as Christ's example requires trust in God's sovereignty and goodness. Believers can confidently face each day, knowing that God's protection and guidance will sustain them. By offering their lives as a drink offering to others, believers honor God and reflect His love.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on James 4:14b. How does the fleeting nature of life challenge your perspective on its purpose and meaning? How can this realization inspire you to live more intentionally?
2. Explore Colossians 3:1-17. How does Paul emphasize the importance of transforming one's life through Christ-like virtues? Which virtues resonate most with you, and how can you cultivate them in your daily life?
3. Consider the concept of taking up your cross daily, as discussed in the session. How does this concept shape your understanding of following Christ and living as His example?

4. How does Colossians 3:12-17 provide guidance for fostering unity within the body of Christ? How can you actively contribute to creating an atmosphere of harmony and peace among fellow believers?
  5. Reflect on the idea that your life is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3-4). How does this perspective influence your understanding of your life's purpose and your identity in Christ? How can you live more fully in this truth?
  6. In what ways can you emulate Christ's selflessness and humility in your interactions with others, as exemplified in Philippians 2:1-11?
  7. How does trusting God's sovereignty and goodness impact your ability to pour out your life in service to others? How can you cultivate a deeper trust in God's provision and guidance in your life?
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## **October 31 | Session 8 | The Church as a Family**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 8
- Read Ephesians 1:17, 2:18-19, 3:14-19; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 14:26; Galatians 4:6-7

### **Introduction:**

In this session, we explore the profound concept of the church as a family, drawing from biblical passages that highlight the spiritual kinship we share in Christ. We will examine how Jesus' example challenges traditional notions of family, and how the New Testament emphasizes the importance of the church as a unified family under the Fatherhood of God.

### **Challenging Notions of Family:**

Jesus' radical statement in Matthew 12:46-50 and Luke 14:26 confronts the conventional understanding of family. By prioritizing the will of the Father above earthly relationships, Jesus underscores the significance of spiritual kinship and devotion to God.

### **The Family of God: Adoption and Unity:**

The epistles of Paul, particularly in Ephesians, underscore the familial language used to describe our relationship with God. Believers are adopted into the family of God, with Jesus as the older

brother (Romans 8:29). Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19 emphasizes the depth of God's love, seeking to establish believers' rootedness and establishment in Christ's love.

### **A Unity Beyond Earthly Bonds:**

Ephesians 2:18-19 and Galatians 4:6-7 highlight believers' access to the Father through the Spirit, erasing the boundaries that once separated us from God's family. This unity extends across nationalities, cultures, and backgrounds, creating a new family under the headship of Christ.

### **Church as a Heavenly Household:**

Paul uses the imagery of husband and wife to illustrate the church's relationship with Christ, emphasizing mutual love and submission. This family dynamic informs how believers are to view and engage with the church, fostering an environment of unity and support.

### **Equipping the Saints for Ministry:**

Ephesians 4:11-15 elucidates the roles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds within the church family. Rather than a consumer-oriented approach, the church exists to equip believers for ministry and growth, fostering maturity in faith and guarding against deceptive teachings.

### **Living Out the Family Ethos:**

Believers are challenged to view the church not as a service provider but as a family united by faith in Christ. The church's programs and structures are secondary to the individual's dedication to pursuing Christ's will and serving others. A family-centered mindset empowers believers to engage fully in their spiritual journey.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on Jesus' teachings in Matthew 12:46-50 and Luke 14:26. How does prioritizing God's will above earthly relationships challenge your understanding of spiritual kinship?
2. Explore the passages from Ephesians (1:17, 2:18-19, 3:14-19) and Galatians 4:6-7. How do these verses reveal the depth of God's love and the unity of believers as members of God's family?

3. Consider the imagery of husband and wife used to describe the church's relationship with Christ. How does this metaphor influence your perception of the church and your role within it?
  4. Examine Ephesians 4:11-15. How does the equipping of believers for ministry contribute to the growth and unity of the church family?
  5. Reflect on your attitude toward the church. Do you approach it as a consumer seeking services or as a member of a spiritual family? How can you shift your perspective to embrace the church as a family and actively contribute to its growth?
  6. Imagine if your church had no programs. How would your commitment to Christ and service be impacted? How can you ensure that your dedication to Christ remains steadfast regardless of external programs?
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## **November 7 | Session 9 | Ephesians and the Influence of Money**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 9
- Read Acts 19:1-41, 20:13-38; Revelation 2:1-7; Philippians 4:10-20; 1 Timothy 6:1-21; pages 290-294 from the recommended book

### **Background to Ephesus:**

Ephesus, a prominent city in the Roman Empire, resembled the modern hub of New York in its commerce, religion, and entertainment. Renowned for its trade and cultural significance, Ephesus thrived economically through practices like sorcery and idol worship. The city's centerpiece, the Temple of Artemis, drew numerous visitors and served as the heart of pagan devotion.

### **The Love of Money and False Doctrine:**

In the book of Revelation (2:2, 4), the Ephesian church is commended for resisting false doctrine yet reprimanded for forsaking their initial love. Historical context and Paul's warnings (Acts 20:25-35) suggest that the church's downfall may have been linked to the allure of wealth.

### **Paul's Warnings Against Greed:**



Paul's farewell message to the Ephesian elders included two crucial admonitions: guarding against false teaching and rejecting greed. Given Ephesus' economic and religious landscape, these warnings were relevant and vital.

### **Temptations of Wealth and Distraction:**

The city's opulence and constant enticements could have tempted the church to pursue worldly success and grandeur, similar to contemporary pressures within the modern church. Greed and jealousy could obscure their devotion to Christ and impede genuine spiritual growth.

### **Emphasis on Generosity and Contentment:**

Paul offers solutions to these challenges. In 1 Timothy 6:18, he encourages believers to be "rich in good works, ready to share." Acts 20:32 alludes to believers having a divine inheritance. Generosity and selflessness counteract the detrimental effects of wealth-seeking, aligning with Christ's teachings on loving one's neighbor.

### **Finding Satisfaction in God:**

Contrary to misconceptions, Paul does not advocate poverty; he illustrates contentment regardless of circumstances (Philippians 4:12). The popular verse, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13), reflects his reliance on God's provision and encouragement.

### **Balancing Work and Faith:**

Paul's example of providing for himself and others through work (Acts 20:34) highlights the importance of diligence. God's intention is for believers to find satisfaction in their possessions while avoiding covetousness and discontentment.

### **Conclusion:**

The Ephesian context and Paul's teachings emphasize the perils of succumbing to the allure of wealth and the subsequent neglect of spiritual devotion. Through generosity, contentment, and a reliance on God's strength, believers can counteract the dangers of materialism and maintain their unwavering commitment to Christ.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on the historical parallels between Ephesus' culture and challenges and those faced by the modern church. How can we guard against similar temptations today?
  2. Explore the correlation between the Ephesian church's devotion and their susceptibility to the love of money. How might the pursuit of wealth hinder our spiritual growth?
  3. Analyze Paul's emphasis on generosity and contentment. How can these principles counteract the negative effects of materialism and greed in our lives?
  4. Consider the concept of finding satisfaction in God, as exemplified by Paul. How can a deepened reliance on God's provision lead to contentment and spiritual growth?
  5. Reflect on the balanced approach of work and faith. How can we align our work ethic with the teachings of Scripture while avoiding the pitfalls of covetousness and discontentment?
  6. Think about the broader implications of Paul's warnings to the Ephesian church. How can the lessons from Ephesus shape our understanding of church dynamics and priorities today?
  7. Reflect on how the lessons from the Ephesian church's challenges with money and devotion are relevant to your life and your local church context. How can you actively apply the principles of generosity, contentment, and reliance on God's strength to strengthen your spiritual journey and your church community?
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## **November 14 | Session 10 | The Philosophy of Man**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 10
- Read Colossians 2:12-15; Ephesians 2:1-10, 5:14; Romans 6:1-14

### **Modernism vs. Postmodernism:**

Modernism emerged during the Enlightenment, focusing on logical problem-solving and scientific progress to address world issues. However, the approach fell short, leading to postmodern thought that rejects absolute truth in favor of individual perspectives. Paul's warning in Colossians 2:8 highlights the danger of embracing worldly philosophies that diverge from Christ's teachings.

### **The Threat of Gnosticism:**

Reference to Gnosticism, a heretical movement from the 2nd century, underlines the constant threat of adding new knowledge or rules to the Gospel. In Paul's time, this manifested as attempts to impose circumcision, dietary regulations, or observances of special days. Such additions undermine the sufficiency of Christ's work and can lead to a diluted Gospel message.

**Identity in Christ and Gospel Purity:**

Paul addresses the danger of compromising the Gospel by emphasizing believers' identity in Christ. Recognizing one's standing in Christ promotes rest and trust in Him, eliminating the need to earn salvation through works. Galatians 2:21 reinforces the principle that righteousness is through grace by faith, not by adding human merit.

**Guarding Against Heresy:**

The session highlights the risk of various heretical beliefs infiltrating the church and corroding its foundation. These false doctrines act like infections, jeopardizing the integrity of the Gospel truth and the church as a whole. To preserve the church's health and purity, vigilance is crucial in upholding the authentic Gospel message.

**List of Popular Heresies:**

<b>Adoptionism</b>	The belief Jesus is not eternally God but became God sometime after His birth
<b>Antinomianism</b>	The belief that Christians are not bound by God’s law and are free to sin as they please; That Jesus' rescues from the guilt of sin but not its power..
<b>Anti-Paulism</b>	The belief that the Apostle Paul was a heretic and that the books he wrote are not a part of Biblical Canon
<b>Apollonarianism</b>	The belief that the Logos took the place of the rational human soul of Jesus. That though Jesus was a man, He did not have a human mind but that the mind of Christ was solely divine. Apollinaris taught that the two natures of

	Christ could not coexist within one person. His solution was to lessen the human nature of Christ.
<b>Arianism</b>	The belief that Jesus and the Holy Spirit were lesser, created beings and not persons of the Godhead .
<b>Christian Deism</b>	The belief that God does not intervene in or interact with the world.
<b>Docetism</b>	The belief that Jesus was divine but only seemed to be human.
<b>Donatism</b>	The Belief that the efficacy of the sacraments depends on the character of the minister.
<b>Dual Covenant Theology</b>	The belief that Jews can still be saved without believing in Jesus
<b>Ebionites</b>	A Jewish-Christian group which believed that Jesus did not exist before his birth and that God adopted him at his baptism.
<b>Eutychianism</b>	The belief that Jesus' finite human nature is swallowed up in His infinite divine nature.
<b>Gay Theology</b>	The belief that homosexuality is not a sin. Consequently, the full gospel of rescue from sin's tyranny is withheld from those who self-identify as "gay"

<b>Gnosticism</b>	Holds to a radical dualism of good and evil and believes secret knowledge is necessary for salvation. This contrasts sharply with Christianity which affirms the good of creation. Gnostics think matter is evil.
<b>Inclusivism</b>	The belief that faith is not necessary for salvation and that God's mercy is so wide that it embraces all non-Christian peoples on the earth
<b>Kenosis</b>	The belief that Jesus ceased to be divine while on Earth
<b>Kinism</b>	The belief that people are only to consort, worship, and marry people of their same race.
<b>Legalism</b>	Trusting in one's own righteousness (or anything) aside from Jesus to win acceptance with God
<b>Liberalism</b>	The belief that Scripture is not inerrant or infallible (not to be confused with the political system of the same name)
<b>Limited Theism</b>	The belief that God's powers are or can be limited and He is not All-Powerful
<b>Marcionism</b>	The belief that the God of the O.T. is evil and the God of the N.T. is good. Affirms 11 books in the Canon
<b>Macedonianism</b>	The belief that God the Holy Spirit is not a member of the Godhead but merely a creation of God.

<b>Manichaeism</b>	The belief that good and evil are both equally powerful in ability and/or authority.
<b>Modalism</b>	The belief that the members of the Trinity are not three distinct persons but three different aspects of the same person.
<b>Monarchianism</b>	The belief that God is one person.
<b>Monophysitism</b>	The belief that Jesus had only one nature: divine.
<b>Montanism</b>	The belief that the Bible is either insufficient or incomplete, and that new revelation from God is being regularly given.
<b>Moralistic Therapeutic Deism</b>	the new American Religion.
<b>Neo-Orthodoxy</b>	The belief that the Bible is not the Inspired Word of God unless it is being read by a believer.
<b>Neoplatonism</b>	The belief that all existence consists of emanations from the One with whom the soul may be reunited
<b>Nestorianism</b>	The belief that Jesus was two persons.
<b>Open Theism</b>	The belief that God is not omniscient and doesn't know the future.

<b>Partialism</b>	The belief that each member of the Trinity is 1/3 of God rather than being fully God.
<b>Pelagianism</b>	The belief that human nature is untainted by the Fall of Man and is not corrupted with Original Sin.
<b>Pluralism</b>	The belief that two or more religions can be true at one time.
<b>Positive Thinking</b>	The belief that your thoughts have the God-like ability to create your reality.
<b>Prosperity Gospel</b>	The belief that the promises of the Gospel include good physical health and Earthly wealth.
<b>Progressive Christianity</b>	a post-modern theological approach, a revisionist view of the Scriptures, with a strong focus on social justice and an over-emphasis on politics. Rooted in Liberal Christianity of the modern-era.
<b>Rauschenbuschism</b>	(the social gospel) The belief that the main purpose of the Gospel is to be the cure for social issues rather than the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.
<b>Semi-Pelagianism</b>	The belief that man and God cooperate to achieve man's salvation.(with man initiating
<b>Socinianism</b>	A Denial of the Trinity. The belief that Jesus is a deified man

<b>Subordinationism</b>	The belief that the Son is lesser than the Father in essence and or attributes.
<b>Trinitarian Heresies</b>	Here is a list of major heresies which deny the biblical teaching on the Trinity
<b>Tritheism</b>	The belief that the Godhead is actually three separate gods
<b>Universalism</b>	The belief that everyone will go to Heaven
<b>Word of Faith</b>	The belief that human words have the God-like power to create or destroy.
<b>Works Righteousness</b>	The belief that we are saved by works or a combination of faith and works rather than by faith alone

**Conclusion:**

Remaining vigilant against the infiltration of worldly philosophies and false doctrines is essential for maintaining the integrity of the Gospel message. The church's foundation must rest solely on Christ's work, devoid of human additions, in order to safeguard its identity and purpose.

**Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Reflect on the historical context of modernism and postmodernism. How can these philosophical perspectives influence the church's perception of truth and its message?
2. Consider the danger of Gnosticism and the addition of rules to the Gospel. How can the church today be susceptible to similar tendencies?
3. Explore the significance of identity in Christ. How does understanding our standing in Christ protect us from falling into works-based salvation?
4. Reflect on Galatians 2:21. How can attaching human merit to salvation nullify Christ's work? Why is this warning still relevant today?



5. Discuss the concept of heresy infiltrating the church. How can these false teachings impact the church's unity and spiritual health?
  6. Consider practical strategies for guarding against the erosion of Gospel purity within the church. How can believers and church leaders actively prevent false doctrines from taking root?
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## **November 21 | Session 11 | Conflict Resolution**

### **Preparation:**

- Watch Video 11
- Read Philemon 1; Matthew 18:15-19

### **Restoring Relationships: The Story of Philemon**

The session introduces the letter of Paul to Philemon, a resident of Colosse. The context involves a conflict between Philemon and his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had encountered Paul and become a believer. Paul's purpose is to restore their broken relationship, exemplifying the principles of conflict resolution. Four types of conflict participants are identified: those who love conflict, those who avoid it, those who engage with it, and those who relish others' conflict.

### **Addressing Conflict with Love and Honor:**

Paul addresses Philemon, recognizing his position and influence within the church community. Despite his authority, Paul emphasizes the importance of appealing out of love rather than imposing a directive (Philemon 1:1-2). Paul's approach models that conflict resolution is not about winning but restoring.

### **The Foundation of Partnership and Fellowship:**

Paul highlights the deep fellowship (*koinonia*) between believers, stressing the unity and commitment they share. This partnership in faith deepens understanding and strengthens bonds (Philemon 1:6-7). Conflict resolution is grounded in this profound relationship, which transcends mere interactions.

### **Self-Sacrifice and Humility in Restoration:**

Paul's approach to conflict resolution is marked by humility and self-sacrifice. He offers to pay for any wrong or debt committed by Onesimus, urging Philemon to embrace him not as a runaway slave but as a brother (Philemon 1:18-19). This underscores the value of restoration over retaliation.

### **Applying Christ's Model of Conflict Resolution:**

Paul's conflict resolution approach echoes the principles outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-19. The process involves addressing the issue privately first, then involving a few witnesses if necessary, and ultimately seeking the involvement of the church community. The emphasis is on restoration and unity within the body of believers.

### **Conclusion: Pursuing Unity and Restoration**

Conflict resolution within the church is a crucial aspect of maintaining unity and embodying Christ-like love. By following the model set forth by Paul and the teachings of Jesus, believers can navigate conflicts with humility, self-sacrifice, and a commitment to restoration. The session encourages participants to reflect on their own approach to conflict and embrace a Christ-centered model of resolution.

### **Discussion and Reflection:**

1. Discuss the different approaches to conflict mentioned (loving conflict, avoiding it, engaging with it, enjoying others' conflict). Which type do you identify with, and how might you grow in conflict resolution?
2. Reflect on the concept of partnership and fellowship among believers. How does the depth of your relationships impact your commitment to conflict resolution?
3. Consider the self-sacrificial nature of Paul's appeal and its application to conflict resolution. How can humility and selflessness transform the outcome of conflicts?
4. Explore the practical steps outlined in Matthew 18:15-19 for resolving conflicts within the church. How can this process promote unity and restoration?
5. Share personal experiences of conflicts within the church and evaluate the outcomes based on the principles discussed. What could have been done differently to achieve restoration?
6. Reflect on the statement "Conflict resolution is not about winning but restoring." How does this perspective align with Christ's teachings and examples?

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**November 28 | Session 12 Review projects**

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