

## EPISTLES OVERVIEW

The overarching aim of the New Testament epistles is to show the relationship between what one believes and how one lives. The perspective of the NT writers is that the gospel ought to change everything about you. How you live is a reflection of what you believe, and what you believe will determine how you live. The 2 major threats to sound doctrine and holy living are false teachers and persecution, which are both orchestrated by demonic forces waging war against the Church.

### PHILIPPIANS

**Historical Background:** Philippi was home to a lot of retired Roman soldiers and therefore the city was brimming with patriotic nationalism and loyalty to Caesar. Paul wrote from prison to encourage the Phillipians as they endured intense persecution for their loyalty to King Jesus.

**Overall Message:** All the themes of the letter spring from the beautiful poetic retelling of the gospel in 2:5-11. Just as Christ humbled Himself, suffered, died, and then was exalted by God as King of creation; Christians likewise should seek to serve rather than be served, expect suffering, be willing to die for the gospel, and trust that God will one day exalt them. Paul spends the rest of the letter encouraging them to consider his example as he has followed Christ's, for it has brought him joy in the midst of suffering because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

### COLOSSIANS

**Historical Background:** The Colossian church was in danger of being infiltrated by false teachers. Some false teachers were pressuring them to become Jews (think Galatians). Others were pressuring them to merely add Jesus to the pantheon of Greek gods.

**Overall Message:** Believing that Christ is one god among many, or that His gospel is not sufficient to save reveals a clear misunderstanding of who He is. Thus Paul writes to exalt Christ as the supreme Lord over all creation (no other gods besides Him) who perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf (no works need to be added to His gospel). The response to who Jesus is ought to be complete devotion to Him and a transformed life through the power of His gospel.

### 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

**Historical Background:** Paul saw many people come to faith within the first month of his arrival in Thessalonica. This prompted an intense wave of persecution that drove Paul and his travel companions out of the city before they had much time to disciple the new believers.

**Overall Message:** Paul uses both letters to encourage them to endure persecution and to answer their immediate questions, specifically about the Second Coming. In the first letter Paul rebukes false teachers and clarifies that Christ is in fact coming back. And since Christ is coming back it really matters how you live. Therefore, be holy! In the second letter Paul addresses those who were afraid that Christ had already returned and reassures them that nothing in all of creation will miss His return. Therefore the message of both letters: Christ is coming! But He hasn't come yet.

## 1 TIMOTHY

**Historical Background:** Timothy was Paul's spiritual son whom he sent to Ephesus in order to confront the infiltration of false teachers. The false teachers were majoring on the minors (like genealogies), they were teaching abstinence from food and sex, and they were motivated by greed. This letter aims to help Timothy work through the issues and establish a healthy church.

**Overall Message:** Timothy's task was not merely to remove the false teachers, he needed to fix the damage and raise up a healthy church. Paul helps explain that this starts with establishing godly leaders whose lives have actually been transformed by the gospel they claim to believe. Then these godly leaders can build up the church through prayer and sound doctrine so that their people can have the power and structure necessary for a transformed, holy life.

## 2 TIMOTHY

**Historical Background:** Paul wrote this letter as he awaited his execution. Most of his friends had abandoned him, therefore he was nearing death alone in a prison cell. He wrote to Timothy to pass along his mission to him and to encourage him to endure through persecution.

**Overall Message:** Paul encourages Timothy to consider Christ's example, who endured suffering for the joy that was set before Him; just as athletes, soldiers, and farmers endure hardship for the joy set before them. He encourages him to keep standing up to the false teachers, to major on the core doctrines of the faith, and to stand on the authority of the Scriptures which have the power to save and transform. Following Christ in this way will bring suffering, but Christ is worthy and will be with you in the midst of the suffering.

## TITUS

**Overall Message** Paul had sent Titus to the island of Crete in order to address issues that had arisen in the churches. Cretans were notorious for lying, stealing, and brutal behavior. Some of this corruption had infiltrated the church. This letter aims to help instruct Titus as he removes the corrupt leaders, establishes godly leaders, and teaches the life transforming gospel of Jesus.

## PHILEMON

**Overall Message:** Philemon was a Christian slave owner who had a slave (named Onesimus) wrong him and run away. Onesimus eventually became friends with Paul and gave his life to Christ. Paul writes to Philemon to show how the gospel transcends social status and has the power to reconcile any relationship. Thus Paul write to Philemon to reconcile with Onesimus and to invite him back as a brother and fellow slave of Christ.

## JAMES

**Overall Message:** James was the half brother of Jesus who confessed faith in his brother after His resurrection and then became a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church. James is known as the Proverbs of the New Testament, and it echoes the Sermon on the Mount throughout. The first chapter acts as a table of contents, then the rest of the book picks up on each theme and expounds upon it. The main theme throughout is this: Faith without works is dead.