



2.5 The Shorter Pauline Epistles I: Colossians, Philippians, II Thessalonians & Philemon

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Having examined the longer, more detailed and thorough correspondence of Paul, we turn now to the first of two weeks of classes examining the Shorter Pauline Epistles. We begin with two Letters that are considered to be a genuine part of the Pauline corpus (Philippians and Philemon), as well as the two Letters that are considered to be “doubtful” (Colossians and II Thessalonians) in that they may contain some genuine Pauline materials, but there are also internal reasons to cast doubt on their ultimate authenticity. Philippians and Philemon are both very warm, friendly letters – Philippians is addressed to Paul’s first church in Europe; and Philemon (the only surviving personal letter of Paul’s in the “authentic” canon) to a church leader in Colossae whose slave, Onesimus, has run away. As to the two “doubtful” letters, Colossians, possibly written by a Pauline disciple, addresses some esoteric errors in Christology; whereas II Thessalonians, which is very imitative of I Thessalonians, focuses on eschatology and apocalyptic signs, yet with some significant differences from Paul’s first letter.

Assignment #8 for Class on Saturday 16th March 2019

Reading

Please read through Paul’s Letters to the Colossians, the Philippians, II Thessalonians, and Philemon. I suggest reading the Introductions to each Letter in your Oxford Annotated NRSV Bible beforehand; and then reading through the Letters one by one. Each letter is very short and can be read at one sitting. Go back and re-read the Letters again at a subsequent time, using the annotations in your NRSV to help with clarification and interpretation. [It’s worth briefly re-reading / skimming over I Thessalonians to see the parallels with II Thessalonians.]

Thinking & Responding

For this week’s Response Paper, I’d like you to address Two (2) Issues.

- (1) In approximately 250 words, Compare and Contrast the Christology of the “Christ Hymns” in Philippians 2:5-11 with that in Colossians 1:15-20. How Expansive is Paul’s Understanding of Jesus in his use of these pre-existing liturgies?
- (2) In approximately 250 words, Explore the Triangular relationship of Reconciliation between Philemon (God), Onesimus (a Sinner), and Paul (a Christ-like Mediator). How does this little Gem of a Letter capture the Gospel in a Nutshell?

Please write your Two Responses of approximately 500 words in total on these two subjects (12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margin, with your name at the top of the paper). Type up and print your Reflections, and be ready to share and discuss your Insights. I will collect them in to review and grade at the end of the class.