

## **Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 23, Colossians, Philemon Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

### **1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 23, Colossians, Philemon, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

Dr. Mathewson's lecture focuses on the New Testament books of Colossians and Philemon. He explores Colossians as Paul's response to a potentially harmful, mystical type of Judaism, arguing that Paul emphasizes the supremacy of Christ and ethical living as the antidote to false teachings. The lecture then transitions to Philemon, a personal letter, and examines various interpretations of the relationship between Philemon, Onesimus, and Paul, proposing Onesimus sought Paul as an arbitrator, not as a runaway. Mathewson highlights that Philemon models love and forgiveness in a society divided by social barriers, emphasizing the shared faith between master and slave. The lecture concludes by pondering why Paul does not directly condemn slavery but chooses a more persuasive approach.

**2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 23 – Double click icon  
to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).**



**Mathewson\_NTLit\_S  
ession23.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 23, Colossians, Philemon

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. Mathewson's lecture on Colossians and Philemon:

#### Briefing Document: Colossians & Philemon

##### Main Themes & Ideas:

This lecture explores the books of Colossians and Philemon, emphasizing their interconnectedness and the specific contexts that prompted Paul to write them. The lecture addresses the false teaching in Colossae, Paul's response, and the nuances of Paul's appeal regarding Onesimus in Philemon.

##### I. Colossians:

- **Addressing False Teaching:** Colossians is interpreted as Paul's response to a developing false teaching within the Colossian church. Mathewson emphasizes the difficulty of pinpointing the exact nature of this teaching ("This is something scholars call mirror reading."), as the letter only provides one side of the conversation. He posits that this teaching, unlike that in Galatians, is not yet fully entrenched but is attracting Christians within the Colossian culture.
- **Nature of the False Teaching:** While some interpret the false teaching as a syncretism of Jewish and pagan elements, Mathewson argues it's likely rooted solely in Judaism. He suggests it resembled apocalyptic or Essene-type Judaism, characterized by asceticism, ritual purity, and mystical elements (visions, angel worship). Paul's concern is that believers are being drawn to this teaching seeking something beyond what Christ offers.
- **Paul's Response: Christ's Supremacy & Ethical Living:** Paul counters the false teaching by highlighting the supremacy of Christ, stating that Christians already have everything they need in Him. He identifies the primary problem with the false teaching is not solely theological deviation, but the ethical implications: "So, for Paul, false teaching is not just something that leads you away theologically but leads one astray ethically as well." Paul criticizes the false teaching for cutting itself off from Christ ("not holding fast to the head, Jesus Christ"), rendering its ascetic practices ineffective in overcoming self-indulgence.

- **Ethical Implications: Seeking the Things Above** Paul emphasizes setting one's mind on "things above" (Colossians 3:1-4) as the solution, not the ascetic practices of the false teachers. He clarifies this "seeking the things above" as an ethical way of life characterized by compassion, kindness, humility, and forgiveness (Colossians 3:12ff), and avoiding vices such as anger, malice, slander, and abuse of speech. This isn't about mystical experiences, but about practical, ethical behavior rooted in union with Christ.
- **Old Self vs. New Self & Image of God:** Mathewson connects Paul's language of the "old self" and "new self" (Colossians 3:9-10) to Genesis 1 and 2. He posits that Adam failed to reflect God's glory, that failure is now being addressed and remedied in Christ ("the image of the invisible God"), and renewed in believers who are part of the new creation.
- **Indicative vs. Imperative:** Paul's writing contains a tension between the "already" and the "not yet." Paul balances statements of fact (indicative) with commands (imperative). For example, "you have died to Christ" (Colossians 3:3) is followed by "put to death" earthly desires (Colossians 3:5). This demonstrates that while believers are united with Christ, they still live in a fallen world and must actively strive for righteousness.
- **Summary of Colossians:** The way to combat false teaching is to teach the supremacy of Christ and call for a life of complete obedience to him, emphasizing not only a doctrinal understanding of Christ's supremacy but also a commitment to ethical living.

## II. Philemon:

- **Context & Connection to Colossians:** Philemon, a very short and personal letter, was likely sent at the same time as Colossians, with shared figures like Onesimus mentioned in both. Philemon was probably a wealthy Christian slave owner in Colossae, whose house may have served as a house church.
- **Reconstructing the Situation:** Mathewson discusses three common reconstructions of the situation behind Philemon:
  1. **Onesimus as a Runaway Slave:** Onesimus wronged Philemon and fled, met Paul in prison, and converted.
  2. **Onesimus Sent by the Church:** Onesimus was sent by Philemon and the Colossian church to minister to Paul in prison.

3. **Onesimus as *Amicus Domini* (Friend of the Master):** Mathewson favors this view: Onesimus sought Paul as an arbitrator in a dispute with Philemon, as was permitted under Roman law.
  - **Paul's Goal:** While Onesimus seeks out Paul as an arbitrator, he ends up being converted to Christianity. Paul wants Philemon to accept Onesimus back, not as a slave but as a brother in Christ. Mathewson suggests Paul subtly wants Philemon to release Onesimus altogether so he can serve alongside Paul.
  - **Letter as a Recommendation:** Philemon resembles a letter of recommendation, where the author (Paul) recommends someone (Onesimus) to the recipient (Philemon). This includes a request for Philemon to act favorably towards Onesimus and return the favor at a later date.
  - **Significance of Philemon: Model of Leadership:** The letter shows Paul's leadership through tactful persuasion rather than direct apostolic command.
  - **Love and Forgiveness:** Philemon emphasizes love and forgiveness in a society divided by social barriers.
  - **Gospel Transcends Barriers:** The gospel transcends social distinctions like slave and master, echoing Galatians 3:28. Philemon and Onesimus share equally in the Gospel: "The gospel of love and forgiveness. If Philemon shares in and participates in the gospel, so does Onesimus. They are both equal participants in, equal shares in this gospel that transcends social distinctions."
  - **Why Not Condemn Slavery?:** Mathewson poses the question of why Paul doesn't directly condemn slavery in the letter, setting up further discussion for a future lecture.

This briefing document encapsulates the key points of Dr. Mathewson's lecture, providing a solid foundation for further study and discussion of Colossians and Philemon.

## 4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 23, Colossians, Philemon

### Colossians and Philemon: A Study Guide

#### Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is "mirror reading," and how is it applied to the study of Colossians?
2. What are the three main elements (mentioned in the lecture) that make up the "syncretism" of the false teaching?
3. According to Paul, what are the two primary problems with the Colossian false teaching?
4. In Colossians 3, what does Paul mean by "seeking the things above?"
5. What is the significance of the "old self" and "new self" imagery in Colossians?
6. What is meant by the "indicative imperative" in Paul's writings, and how is it illustrated in Colossians?
7. What are the three common approaches to reconstructing the situation behind Philemon?
8. What is the meaning of the Latin term *amicus domini*?
9. Why is Philemon considered a model of love and forgiveness in a society that draws distinctions?
10. According to the lecture, why didn't Paul condemn slavery outright in the book of Philemon?

#### Answer Key

1. "Mirror reading" is a technique used by scholars to understand the context behind a letter by inferring the issues or problems being addressed from the author's response. In Colossians, scholars use mirror reading to understand the nature of the false teaching that Paul is addressing.
2. The lecture lists a syncretism with a Jewish element, an ascetic element ("don't touch, don't taste, don't handle"), and a mystical element (worship of angels and visionary experiences). However, the lecturer argues that is simply Jewish, and

there's no need to look outside of Judaism of the first century for this false teaching.

3. According to Paul, the primary problems are that the false teaching cuts itself off from Christ, and it has no value for overcoming sin and self-indulgence. Paul sees these two issues as being closely related, where being cut off from Christ directly leads to the lack of power over sin.
4. Paul is referring to an ethical manner of living one's life. It is not about physical, worldly objects and possessions but about avoiding vices and putting on virtues.
5. The "old self" represents a person under the influence of sin and the present evil age, dominated by Adam, while the "new self" represents a person's identity in Christ, belonging to a realm characterized by righteousness, life, and the Holy Spirit. Paul uses this imagery to emphasize the transformation that occurs when someone is united with Christ.
6. The "indicative imperative" refers to Paul's practice of making absolute statements about what is already true for believers in Christ (the indicative), followed by commands on how they should live in light of that reality (the imperative). This is seen in Colossians when Paul states that believers have died to sin but still need to actively put sin to death.
7. The three common approaches are that Onesimus was a runaway slave, Onesimus was sent by Philemon and the church to minister to Paul, and Onesimus sought out Paul as an *amicus domini* to arbitrate a dispute.
8. *Amicus domini* is a Latin term for "friend of the master" in Roman law where a slave could find an arbitrator to settle a dispute with his master.
9. Philemon models love and forgiveness by advocating for Onesimus's acceptance not merely as a slave, but as a brother in Christ, transcending the social hierarchy between master and slave. This demonstrates the power of the gospel to break down social barriers and promote equality among believers.
10. According to the lecture, Paul doesn't condemn slavery outright because instead, he tactfully models love and forgiveness in a society that draws distinctions, such as slave and master.

## Essay Questions

1. Analyze the key characteristics of the false teaching addressed in Colossians. How does Paul refute this teaching, and what alternative does he offer?
2. Discuss the significance of the "Christ Hymn" in Colossians 1:15-20. How does it establish the supremacy of Christ, and how does this relate to the overall message of the letter?
3. Explain the concept of the "already but not yet" in Paul's theology, using examples from Colossians to illustrate your points.
4. Explore the various interpretations of Onesimus's situation in the book of Philemon. Which interpretation do you find most convincing, and why?
5. Discuss the ethical and social implications of Paul's appeal to Philemon regarding Onesimus. How does this letter challenge the social norms of the first century, and what message does it have for contemporary readers?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocalyptic Literature:** A genre of literature that reveals hidden or secret knowledge, often involving visions of the future, cosmic battles, and the intervention of divine beings. Examples include Daniel and Revelation.
- ***Amicus Domini*:** Latin for "friend of the master," referring to a Roman legal provision that allowed a slave to seek an arbitrator to resolve disputes with his master.
- **Asceticism:** A lifestyle characterized by self-denial and abstention from worldly pleasures, often for religious reasons.
- **Essenes:** A Jewish sect in the Second Temple period known for their ascetic practices, communal living, and emphasis on ritual purity. They are often associated with the Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- **House Church:** A small Christian community that met in private homes during the early centuries of Christianity.
- **Indicative Imperative:** A theological concept in Pauline writings where statements of fact about believers' identity in Christ (indicative) are followed by commands on how they should live (imperative).
- **Mirror Reading:** A method of interpreting a text by inferring the situation or issues that prompted its writing based on the author's response or arguments.
- **Old Self/New Self:** Pauline imagery referring to the contrast between a person's life under the influence of sin (old self) and their new identity and transformed life in Christ (new self).
- **Provenance:** The place of origin or earliest known history of something.
- **Qumran:** An ancient settlement near the Dead Sea where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. It is believed to have been inhabited by the Essenes.
- **Syncretism:** The blending or fusion of different religious or philosophical beliefs and practices.



## 5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 23, Colossians, Philemon, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Colossians and Philemon FAQ

- **What was the main issue Paul addressed in Colossians?**
- Paul wrote to address a false teaching threatening to lead Christians in Colossae astray. This teaching seemed to combine Jewish elements, ascetic practices ("don't touch, don't taste, don't handle"), and mystical elements like angel worship and visions. It potentially resembled apocalyptic or Essene Judaism. Paul was primarily concerned that this teaching cut people off from Christ and had no value in overcoming sin and self-indulgence.
- **According to Paul, how should Christians combat false teaching in Colossae?**
- Paul emphasizes the supremacy of Christ and living a life of complete obedience to Him. This involves setting one's mind on things above, recognizing one's union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and living ethically. He advocates for avoiding vices and embracing virtues like compassion, kindness, humility, and forgiveness. It's not about mystical experiences but about practical, ethical living rooted in Christ.
- **What does Paul mean by "old self" and "new self" in Colossians?**
- The "old self" refers to one's entire person (physically, spiritually, emotionally) within the realm of sin and under the influence of Adam's legacy of sin and death. The "new self" is who we are in Christ, belonging to a new realm of influence characterized by righteousness, life, and the Holy Spirit. This new self is being renewed in the image of God, harking back to Genesis 1 and 2, where humans were created in God's image.

- **What is the significance of the "indicative imperative" in Paul's writing, particularly in Colossians?**
- Paul often makes strong statements (indicatives) about what is already true for Christians by virtue of their union with Christ (e.g., "you have died to sin," "you have put on the new self"). However, he then follows these with commands (imperatives) outlining what they still need to do (e.g., "put to death therefore," "put on"). This reflects the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" aspects of salvation. We are already united with Christ, but we still live in a world influenced by sin.
- **Why is Philemon studied alongside Colossians?**
- Philemon and Colossians were likely written and sent around the same time. Onesimus, a figure in Philemon, is also mentioned in Colossians. Philemon was likely a wealthy Christian slave owner living in Colossae, and his house may have been a meeting place for one of the house churches in the city. Colossians addresses the larger church community, while Philemon is addressed to an individual and his household.
- **What are the different interpretations of Onesimus' situation in Philemon?**
- There are three primary interpretations: (1) Onesimus was a runaway slave who met Paul in prison, (2) Onesimus was sent by Philemon and the church to minister to Paul in prison, and (3) Onesimus sought out Paul as an arbitrator in a dispute with Philemon, taking advantage of Roman law regarding slaves seeking mediation. The third interpretation is considered most probable.
- **What does Paul ask Philemon to do in his letter?**
- Paul asks Philemon to accept Onesimus back, not merely as a slave but as a beloved brother in Christ. While Paul doesn't explicitly command Philemon to free Onesimus, he subtly persuades Philemon to consider releasing Onesimus so he can serve alongside Paul.

- **Why is the letter to Philemon considered valuable despite its personal nature and lack of common theological themes?**
- Philemon models love and forgiveness within a society that is keen to draw distinctions, particularly between master and slave. It demonstrates how the gospel transcends social barriers, echoing Paul's statement in Galatians that in Christ there is neither slave nor free. The letter also reveals Paul's tactful leadership style, where he appeals to love and persuasion rather than simply asserting his apostolic authority. It also may show the early church's stance on slavery and other forms of social distinction.