

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.
Colossians 3:16*

FCF Daily Bible Reading
Daily Readings for the month of July 2008

Tuesday, July 1	Galatians introduction
Wednesday, July 2	Galatians ch.1
Thursday, July 3	Galatians ch.2
Friday, July 4	Galatians ch.3
Monday, July 7	Galatians ch.4
Tuesday, July 8	Galatians ch.5
Wednesday, July 9	Galatians ch.6
Thursday, July 10	Ephesians introduction
Friday, July 11	Ephesians ch.1
Monday, July 14	Ephesians ch.2
Tuesday, July 15	Ephesians ch.3
Wednesday, July 16	Ephesians ch.4
Thursday, July 17	Ephesians ch.5
Friday, July 18	Ephesians ch.6
Monday, July 21	Philippians introduction & ch.1
Tuesday, July 22	Philippians ch.2
Wednesday, July 23	Philippians ch.3
Thursday, July 24	Philippians ch.4
Friday, July 25	Colossians introduction & ch.1
Monday, July 28	Colossians ch.2
Tuesday, July 29	Colossians ch.3
Wednesday, July 30	Colossians ch.4
Thursday, July 31	Re-read one of your favorite chapters from this month

Use Saturdays to catch up and work on your memory verse. Allow Sunday to be your day of rest and worship with God's people.

Scripture Memory Verse for July

Ephesians 2 [8-9] For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--[9] not by works, so that no one can boast.

All four of these New Testaments books were written by the Apostle Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome. Each of these is a *letter* written to a church in a specific region.

Introduction to Galatians

This book (letter) was written to the churches in southern Galatia which were founded on Paul's first missionary journey. It was written about 82 years after the resurrection of Christ.

Most of the first converts and early leaders in the church were Jewish Christians who proclaimed Jesus as their Messiah. As Jewish Christians, they struggled with a dual identity: their Jewishness constrained them to be strict followers of the law; their newfound faith in Christ invited them to celebrate a holy liberty. They wondered how Gentiles (non-Jews) could be part of the kingdom of heaven. This controversy tore the early church apart. Judaizers – an extremist Jewish faction within the church – taught that Gentile Christians had to submit to Jewish laws and traditions *in addition to* believing in Christ. As a missionary to the Gentiles, Paul had to confront this issue many times. Galatians was written, therefore, to refute the Judaizers and to call believers back to the pure gospel. The Good News is for all people – Jews and Gentiles alike. Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus *and nothing else*. Faith in Christ means true freedom.

Introduction to Ephesians

This book (letter) was written to the church at Ephesus which was founded on Paul's second missionary journey. It was written about 93 years after the resurrection of Christ, while Paul was imprisoned in Rome.

The letter to the church at Ephesus was not written to confront any heresy or problem in the churches. It was sent with Tychicus, while Paul was imprisoned, to strengthen the churches in the area. Paul had spent over three years with the Ephesian church. Ephesians is a letter of encouragement. In it Paul describes the nature and appearance of the church, and he challenges believers to function as the living body of Christ on earth.

Introduction to Philippians

This book (letter) was written to the church at Philippi which was founded on Paul's second missionary journey. This was the first church established on the European continent. It was written about 94 years after the resurrection of Christ, while Paul was imprisoned in Rome.

Philippians is Paul's joy letter. The church in that Macedonian city had been a great encouragement to Paul. The Philippian believers had enjoyed a very special relationship with Paul, so he wrote them a personal expression of his love and affection. The Philippian church had sent a gift to Paul while in prison. He wrote this letter to thank them for their gift and to encourage them in their faith. In a life dedicated to serving Christ, Paul had faced excruciating poverty, abundant wealth, and everything in between. Whatever the circumstances, Paul had learned to be content, finding joy as he focused all of his attention and energy on knowing Christ and obeying him.

Introduction to Colossians

This book (letter) was written to the church at Colosse, an obscure little Asian town that Paul had never passed through and whose citizens he had never met. It was written about 93 years after the resurrection of Christ, while Paul was imprisoned in Rome.

What crisis among the Christians in Colosse, strangers as they were to Paul, was urgent enough to draw this intense letter from his heart? It seems that the Colossian church was showing symptoms of invasion by both Jewish legalism and early Gnosticism. It is likely that this troubling news was part of a report brought to Paul in Rome by Epaphras, who was probably converted to Christianity in Ephesus during Paul's ministry there and thought to be the founder of the church in Colosse.

Who were the Gnostics? They were, literally, "the knowing ones," intellectual sophisticates who considered themselves to be a religious aristocracy, arrogantly scornful of "simple" Christianity. By making spirituality complicated, full of regulations and difficult philosophical arguments, they narrowed down the number of people who could attain salvation and thus proclaimed their own uniqueness and superiority. Their belief grew out of grappling with the problem of evil in the world. If God is good, asked the Gnostics, how could he have created a world full of death and failure and pain and injustice? A fair enough question, but their human speculation led them to a false resolution of the problem. They concluded that matter, and the body itself, were evil – so hopelessly evil that God, a Spirit, could never have had direct contact with the world or human beings. In this Gnostic view, the agents of creation and mediators between God and humans were a series of angels or spirits with powers at different levels. To the Gnostics, Jesus was just one of these spirits, less than God in every way, but not truly human either, because to be human was to be evil. In order to control the evil in themselves they practiced various forms of asceticism, or rigid diet and bodily discipline, which echoed some of the legalistic Jewish practices of the day. Another problem in Colossae was the preoccupation with power, any power. The people in that area acknowledged the supernatural power of God, but that was not enough for them. They were eager to investigate other power sources, even ones that were adverse to God such as occult mysticism, astrology, horoscopes, spirit forces in nature, and demonic and angelic powers.

All of these emphases eroded and falsified their view of Jesus Christ as all-powerful, all-loving, a strong and eternal bridge between God and humanity, fully divine but also fully human and thus utterly adequate for human needs. That is why Paul's letter to the Colossians Christians focuses so clearly and constantly on Jesus and his supremacy, centrality, and completeness, often using the vocabulary of the Gnostics but redefining their words in a biblical context.