



Philippians and Philemon (2009): A Commentary (New Testament Library)

Charles B. Cousar

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Paul's letter to the church at Philippi is a moving insight into early Christianity. No letter displays Paul's fondness for a church as much as Philippians, and this passion is accompanied by a profound sense of thanksgiving for the church and its generosity. In this letter, Paul reminds the church of the first day they heard the gospel, the present persecution that they experience in their imperial context, and their true reality as citizens of heaven. Jesus Christ grounds this eschatological framework as the one whom God has lifted up. But in Philippi Paul also faced opponents, and the interpretation of the letter requires that the reader understand these people whose vision of Jesus was other than Paul's.

The short letter to Philemon tells the story of a Christian slave named Onesimus. Through this appeal on Onesimus's behalf, Paul illustrates how the moral vision of social hierarchies, such as the one between slave owner and slave, are dismantled in Christ. He calls Philemon and Onesimus into a reconciliation that points to their shared participation in Christ.

Together, these two letters show Paul's vital passion for the church and the bonds that held early Christians together in their faith.

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