



## COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF PHILEMON

The book was written around 62 AD during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. It is directed to Philemon, which means "kisses" or "one that is affectionate", in behalf of Onesimus, which means "profitable" or "usefulness". Philemon was the master of Onesimus, a runaway slave.

**Verse 1.** Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our beloved and fellow laborer, ...

Why was Paul in prison and how did he get to Rome?

The Prophet Agabus predicted Paul's imprisonment. But Paul was not deterred by the prediction and was willing to be imprisoned for preaching the gospel (Act 21:10-12). He was falsely accused of bringing an uncircumcised Greek into the temple and falsely accused of teaching against the law (Act 21:27-40). Paul was arrested when a Captain in the Roman army saw that Paul's life was in danger by the hands of his accusers, and was moved to send men to Paul's rescue. Paul defended himself against the false accusations by telling the judge that he had formerly persecuted Christians, but now had become a Christian himself. A plot by some overzealous Jews was uncovered, and Paul, being a Roman citizen, was given extra protection from being assassinated (Act 22 and Act 23).

**Verse 2.** And to our beloved Apphia and Archippus our fellow soldiers, and to the church in thy house.

Paul mentioned Apphia, which means "to produce" or "to be fruitful". According to the Parallel Bible commentary, Apphia is believed to be Philemon's wife. He also mentioned Archippus, which means "a governor or master of horses". Archippus is a fellow soldier in God's army, and is believed to be their son. This letter shows how important family is to Paul.

**Verse 3.** Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul mentioned God the Father and Jesus Christ.

If the Holy Spirit is a person as professed by some, Paul did not recognize that in any of his letters; he only acknowledged the Father and the Son. Paul's common salutation is "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 1:3, II Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:1-2, Colossians 1:2, I Thessalonians 1:1 and II Thessalonians 1:2).

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**Verse 4.** I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers...

Paul, despite the fact that he was in prison or in bond, was not bitter and never engaged in a pity party. He was preoccupied with the needs of the saints and took the time to pray for them. Whatever is our lot, we are to emulate Paul and never to be in a bad attitude. We should serve others more during our trials. Serving others in time of trial has a therapeutic effect. It also is a time to dedicate yourself to those who may not have the hope you have.

**Verse 5.** Hearing of thy love and faith, which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.

Paul recognized the work of faith that Philemon had been doing for Jesus and to the saints (Saints are all those who believe and put into practice the teachings of Christ). He was commending him for his good work in a sense.

**Verse 6.** That the communication of your faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus.

For a believer to be effective he/she needs to depend on the wisdom and knowledge that comes from God. One should not depend on his/her own strength. Every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights with whom is no variability, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17).

**Verse 7.** For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by you, brother.

Paul was happy and comforted by the good works Philemon did toward the saints. Therefore he was very proud to call him a brother just as Christ was not ashamed to call the saints brother (Hebrew 2:8-11).

**Verse 8.** Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin you that which is convenient.

Paul, as an apostle, could have commanded Philemon to forgive Onesimus but instead was pleading with him.

**Verse 9.** Yet for love's sake I rather beseech you, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Paul wants Philemon to do what he is about to ask, not out of compulsion, but with the love of God in Christ.

**Verse 10.** I beseech you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.

Onesimus was converted through Paul's preaching of the gospel in Rome, hence he is Paul's son in the faith (I Tim 1:2, Titus 1:4).

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**Verse 11.** Which in time past was to you unprofitable, but now is profitable to you and to me.

Onesimus now lives up to the meaning of his name by being a profitable, useful servant of God. Onesimus was on an errand to the Colossians on behalf of Paul, and Paul called him a beloved brother (Colossians 4:4-7).

**Verse 12.** Whom I have sent again: you therefore receive him that is mine own bowels.

Paul urged Philemon to accord Onesimus the same warm welcome he would if Paul himself were coming to visit.

**Verse 13.** Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.

Paul wanted Philemon to willingly set free so that Onesimus could continue to minister to the saints under Paul's directive.

**Verse 14.** But without your consent I would do nothing; that your benefit should not be as of necessity but willingly.

God wants us to willingly forgive others as he has done to us, and to give to Him with a cheerful heart (I Corinthians 9:6-8).

**Verse 15.** For perhaps he therefore departed for a season that you should receive him forever.

It is not by chance that Onesimus, while on the run, was led to Paul. This led to his conversion. This is an example of how all things work together for good (Romans 8:28).

**Verse 16.** Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, especially to me, but how much more unto you, both in the flesh and in the Lord?

Now that Onesimus has become a member of the household of faith, Philemon and Onesimus are brothers and they will be rewarded together at Christ's return.

**Verse 17.** If you count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

Paul wants Philemon to grant Onesimus the same honor and recognition he would if he was to visit him.

**Verse 18.** If he has wronged you or owed you anything, put that on my account.

Paul wants charged to him all of Onesimus' offences, just as Christ took on all our sins and paid all our debts. As Philemon forgave Onesimus on Paul's request, it was as if he was giving a drink of cold water in the name of a disciple --- and he shall be rewarded for it (Matthew 10:42, I Peter 2:24).

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**Verse 19.** I, Paul, have written with mine own hand; I will repay it: However, I do not say to you how you owed me even your own self.

We owed God a lot and He forgave all our sins. And we owe it to one another to forgive. In the pattern of prayer Jesus spoke on the Mount of Olives, He made it plain that it is paramount for us to forgive one another (Matthew 6:9-12; 8:21-35). Jesus taught us to have a forgiving spirit and not keep record of wrongs done to us.

**Verse 20.** Yes, brother let me have joy of you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

Paul wants Philemon to know, how refreshing it will be to him if Onesimus is accorded a warm forgiving reception as he had requested. The news of the cordial reunion will brighten his day in prison.

**Verse 21.** Having confidence in your obedience I wrote unto you, knowing that you will also do more than I say.

Paul was confident that his request regarding Onesimus' freedom would be granted. God is interested in our obedience to all that He commanded us to do. Obedience is better than sacrifice (I Samuel 15:22). Even in our trials and troubles we should learn to be obedient to God as Jesus Christ did (Hebrew 5:8).

**Verse 22.** But withal prepare for me a lodging: for I trust that through your payers I shall be given unto you.

Paul put his personal request last. He will need a place to stay after his anticipated release (Philippians 2:24).

**Verse 23.** There salute you Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.

Epaphras was very close to Paul in prison as if he was in prison with him. The Book to the Colossians was written while Paul was in prison in Rome. In Colossians 1:7-8 Paul referred to Epaphras as a fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ, and acknowledges that Epaphras is the one who told Paul about the love of God among the Colossian believers.

**Verse 24.** Marcus (John Mark), Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas (Luke) my fellow laborers.

Marcus (John Mark) was Barnabas' nephew, the same one who accompanied but then deserted Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Act 12:24-25). John Mark, being young, could not stand the rigor of the trip and decided to drop out (Act 13:13). At a later time Paul would not allow John Mark to accompany him and Barnabas on a trip because he deserted them the first time (Act 15:36-41). Paul and John were later reconciled and he became a fellow laborer and profitable to him. Timothy was told to bring John Mark, the profitable one, to him for the ministry (II Timothy 4:11).

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Aristarchus was referred to as fellow prisoner (Colossians 4:10).

Demas later turned away from following Christ because he loved the world (II Timothy 4:10). We are admonished not to love the world because if one loves the world the love of the Father is not in him (I John 2:15). Do we love the praise of men such as to compromise with the commandments of God?

Lucas (Luke) the physician humbled himself despite his academic achievement and was willing to serve the people of God and to assist Paul in any way he could (Colossians 4:14; II Timothy 4:11).

**Verse 25.** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit Amen.

Paul concluded with the prayer that the grace of God, which makes reconciliation to God possible so that we can please Him do his will, be with us all.