

Outline of Philemon (from Bible Knowledge Commentary):

- I. The Salutation of the Letter (vv. 1-7)
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- II. The Body of the Letter (vv. 8-21)
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    - 2. A plea for love's sake (v. 9)
    - 3. A plea for a spiritual son (vv. 10-11)
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    - 1. The present brotherhood between Paul and Onesimus (v. 13)
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  - C. The pledge (vv. 18-21)
    - 1. Philemon to charge Onesimus' debt to Paul (vv. 18-19a)
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    - 3. Philemon to refresh Paul (v. 20)
    - 4. Philemon to go beyond Paul's request (v. 21)
- III. The Conclusion of the Letter (vv. 22-25)
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  - B. The fraternal greetings (vv. 23-24)
  - C. The benediction (v. 25)

**Intro:**

I want to tell you a true story. There was a man who lived many years ago. He was a well to do business owner. He was also a Christian. In fact, not just an ordinary Christian, but a committed Christian who willingly opened up his house for ministry. This wealthy man had a family business of sorts. He had a man working for him who was a, well, let's call him an apprentice.

One day, the owner went to work to open shop. When he got there, he could tell something was wrong. He went to the safe, hidden in the back, and opened it. It was empty, the profits from the week gone. Only a few people knew the combination to that safe. The apprentice was one of them. The owner waited for the apprentice to come to work that day. He waited in vain because, you guessed it, he never showed

up. He couldn't believe it. He'd been robbed by his own worker. And no doubt, the apprentice had skipped the country, never to be seen again.

Many months later, the business owner received a letter. He looked at the return address, and was delighted. It was from a close friend of his, in fact, it was from the man who had led him to Christ. As he opened it, he thought about the good times they'd had in the past. They'd even served together once on a short term missionary project.

The first line of the letter shook the business owner up. His friend was in jail in the capital city. He'd been imprisoned because of his involvement in preaching the gospel of Christ.

But that wasn't all. As his eyes moved down the page, he couldn't believe what he saw. It couldn't be! Guess who his friend had met? While locked up in a jail hundreds of miles away, in the midst of a teeming large city, like a needle in a haystack, his friend had a visitor. Guess who? The apprentice, the one who had robbed him!

Remarkable? Wait until you hear the rest! Guess what had happened to the apprentice? During their prison visit, the friend told the apprentice about Jesus Christ. He told him that Jesus Christ could deliver him from his sinful life. And right there, the runaway apprentice received Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord! It was no "fire insurance" conversion either. It really changed his life, so much so that he became a useful participant in the prison ministry.

Q: Isn't that an incredible story?

Listen, that's not only a true story, it's a story you hold in your lap. It's found in your Bible (I've embellished the story a little to fill in the gaps!).

Q: Where will you find this story in your Bible?

A: The book of Philemon.

Tonight, we want to begin a brief series examining this one chapter book of Philemon. It's a heart warming book. Very personal, even a little sentimental.

#### The Characters in Philemon:

Paul--author of letter (along with Timothy)

Onesimus--runaway slave

Philemon--the owner of the slave

Apphia--wife of Philemon?

Archippus--son of Philemon? Pastor of church?

Tychicus--delivered this letter and Colossians

Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke--ministry associates of Paul (23-24)

Philemon is a great book. One of the gripping themes in the book is the theme of Forgiveness. Can you imagine how Philemon must have felt the first time his eyes met the eyes of his converted, runaway slave Onesimus? Do you think it was difficult for him to forgive? Do you think he wrestled with the painful memories of what he had done to him?

Tonight we want to introduce the book.

**Proposition: As we begin our study of Philemon, let's consider 2 things.**

I. The People involved in Philemon

II. The Purpose of Philemon

A. The Intent

B. The Illustration

V 1 "Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ"

Paul wrote the letter. Typically, Paul began his epistles by identifying himself as "an apostle." But not here. What title does he use?

v 1 "a prisoner"

Paul was in prison. Quite likely, he wrote the letter from Rome, during his first imprisonment in the capital city. If that was the case, it was the summer of 62 AD.

During that imprisonment, he also wrote the prison epistles of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. It seems that Colossians and Philemon were both delivered by Tychicus.

Note: v 1--Timothy was with Paul. Timothy was a great second man.

Throughout the NT, you see Paul doing the talking, taking the lead, while Timothy was the support man. It's tough to play second fiddle.

Illust:

Q: Who received the letter?

A: Paul mentions 4 recipients...

1. Philemon

V 1 "unto Philemon, our dearly beloved, and fellowworker"

Who was Philemon? Apparently, he was a well-to-do business owner in the city of Colossae. It appears he had money. How do we know that? One, he had at least one slave. And two, he had a house large enough so that the church met there (2).

Notice how Paul referred to Philemon--"our dearly beloved." Why so dear?

V 19 "...thou owest me even thine own self besides."

Apparently Paul had led Philemon to Christ. Since we know that Paul had not personally evangelized in Colossae, scholars feel that Paul had met Philemon while ministering in Ephesus (Acts 19:31). Philemon was converted to Christ by Paul.

Isn't it interesting that a man like Paul would describe another man like Philemon by such an affectionate term as "dearly beloved." Why was that? They had a great appreciation for each other. And Paul wasn't afraid or ashamed to express it.

Illust: Board members this week--"What spiritual trait I most appreciate about the person to my right..."

How else did Paul describe Philemon?

V 1 "our fellow worker"

Philemon was a colleague of Paul. Paul disciplined him, and recruited him for ministry, possibly during the 3 year stint in Ephesus.

Illust:

Who else received the letter?

## 2. Apphia

Who was she? We're not sure. Possibly Philemon's wife. It's the only place her name appears in the NT. Paul also describes her as "beloved."

## 3. Archippus

His name means "horseruler." If Apphia was Philemon's wife, it's possible that Archippus was their son. His name also appears in Col 4:17. There we are informed that Archippus was involved in the ministry (as a pastor?) in either Colossae or Laodicea.

Paul reserved a special title for Archippus--"fellow soldier." The only other person Paul complimented with that term was Epaphroditus in Ph 2:25. Apparently, Archippus was a committed, go getter in the ministry. Paul viewed him as a spiritual comrade in army of Christ.

Observation: Paul had relationships with a lot of people. He mentions some 100 people by name in his letters.

Key: Relationships are important in ministry, in life. We need people.

Illust:

Tran: Now I want you to notice something unusual about the letter of Philemon. We've already seen that it was a personal letter, received by Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus. But it was also an Open letter. Notice who else Paul had in mind when he wrote...

## 4. The House Church

V 2 "and to the church in thy house."

There were no church buildings in the first century. The Christians met in houses. In this case, they met in Philemon's house.

Chuck Colson points out a critical fact in The Body. We need a constant this reminder. The church of Jesus Christ is not a building. The church is people. But what do we often say? Things like: "Isn't that a pretty church on the corner of Gallia and South?" "Where do you GO to church?" "I'm GOING to go to church this Sunday."

Key: We don't "go to church." We ARE the church. The local church known as WBC happens to be meeting in this auditorium tonight. 2 1/2 years ago it was meeting in the gym. For the 100 years before that WBC met in a white framed facility. But a building is not a church. And a building does not make a church.

When Paul wrote that this letter was intended for "the church in Philemon's house," he was saying that this was an open letter for all the Christians there (by extension, for us too). What Paul had to say applied to the rest of the church, too.

Next came the standard greeting...

V 3 "Grace to you..."

A standard greeting? Yes. But more than a formality. A Blessing. A brief pronouncement highlighting the fundamental doctrines of Christianity:

1. Grace--We're saved by grace alone. We live by grace alone.
2. To You--Available to specific people, namely to those in Christ.
3. Peace--The great product of Christianity: Peace with God.
4. From God our Father--the Fatherhood of God

Q: Is God the Father of all men?

A: No. Only those who have received Christ are the sons of God (Jn 1:12). Those who are outside of Christ are the children of the devil (Jn 8).

5. The Lord Jesus Christ--The Lordship of Jesus Christ must impact every area of our lives. In Philemon's case, the way he treated a runaway slave must reflect Christ's Lordship. He has changed our lives. We belong to Him.

Tran: We've looked at the People of Philemon. Now...

## **II. The Purpose of Philemon**

### A. The Intent

Q: Why did Paul write this letter?

A: Obviously the issue at hand was how to treat a fugitive slave, Onesimus.

Philemon had a dilemma. In that day, Roman law permitted slave owners to execute a rebellious slave. In fact, owners were encouraged to do so. There were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman empire. Slave holders constantly guarded against the danger of revolt. If a slave ran away, at best he was branded with a red-hot iron on his forehead, with the letter "F" (standing for "fugitivus" =runaway). At worst, he was crucified.

But Philemon was a Christian. What should he do with Onesimus? If he forgave him, what would the other Masters and slaves think? If he punished him, how would it affect his testimony?

That was the intent of Paul's letter, to tell Philemon how to handle this situation in a way that would honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

Illust:

### B. The Illustration

Although Paul's primary intent for writing the letter had to do with human forgiveness, this epistle offers us a marvelous illustration of divine forgiveness. Look at v 18...

V 18 "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee anything, put that on my account."

Onesimus was a felon. He was guilty of two crimes. First, the word "wronged" deals with a legal injustice. Onesimus had broken the law by running away

from his master. And secondly, the word "oweth" implies financial loss through theft. Onesimus was both a fugitive and a thief. His guilt could not be denied.

But what did Paul ask Philemon to do?

"put that to my account"--It's an imperative. The word is a technical, business term. Paul was saying, "I will take care of his debt." The debt could not be ignored. Justice demanded that it be paid. It was love that moved Paul to become a substitute, "Put that to my account." In fact, Paul put it like this in v 17, "Receive him AS MYSELF."

What a great illustration of divine forgiveness! We owed a debt we could not pay. We had run away from God. We robbed Him of the glory He deserved. His justice demanded that we be punished.

But what did Jesus Christ do? He stepped in our shoes and said, "Put that to my account."

Rom 5:8 "But God commended His love...Christ died FOR US."

II Cor 5:21 "For He made Him who knew no sin...sin FOR US..."

Jesus Christ took care of our sin. Jesus Christ took care of our guilt. Jesus Christ took care of our penalty. Jesus Christ took care of our debt. In our behalf, He said, "Put that to my account."

Q: Was His payment sufficient?

Key: What did John say Jesus' final words were on the cross?

Jn 19:30 "It is finished."

The greek word is "tetelestai." It's a business term. It means "to discharge a debt, to pay in full."

When Jesus died on the cross, a transaction occurred. Theologically, that transaction is called imputation. Our sins were imputed to Him. His righteousness was imputed to us. Our debt was charged to His account. His riches were deposited to ours.

Paul's offer was tremendous when he sought to reconcile Philemon with his master Philemon. What a beautiful picture of what the God the Father has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Quote: Martin Luther said, "All of us are Onesimuses!" (Wiersbe, 270)

And he was right!

Role Play: