

LESSON 38
Philemon

LOGOS

A General and Light Survey of the Bible

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Lesson 38

Philemon

- Written by the Apostle Paul while he was in prison in Rome about 62AD.
- One of the “Prison Epistles” along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.
- Written to Philemon, a wealthy resident of Colosse, who was a relatively new Christian.
- The church in Colossae probably met in Philemon’s house.
- The letter was written on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave who had robbed Philemon and ended up in Rome with Paul. Onesimus probably delivered the letter to Philemon.
- The book is just one chapter long.

OUTLINE

- Salutation (vv. 1-3).
Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Paul was in prison in Rome and Timothy was there with him.
 - This is a very personal letter - more personal than any of Paul’s other letters.
 - He mentions, Apphia and Archippus - probably two Christians in the church of Colossae.
- Gratitude (vv. 4-7).
I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.
 - Paul expressed personal appreciation for Philemon.
 - Philemon was probably a leader in the church of Colossae, partly because they met in his house and partly because he had developed a reputation for spiritual maturity.
 - *your love for all his holy people*
 - *your faith in the Lord Jesus*
 - *your partnership with us in the faith*
 - *you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people*
 - Paul prayed that Philemon would continue to grow in the faith.

- Paul's request (vv. 8-21)
 - *Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. (vv. 8-14)*
 - Paul begins by reminding Philemon that he has the authority as an Apostle to simply tell Philemon what to do, but he wants this to be Philemon's decision.
 - Onesimus has accepted Christ and was helping Paul.
 - Paul has developed an affection for Onesimus.
 - Paul is asking a favor - a pretty big favor in the first century.
 - *Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. (v. 15-16)*
 - As a Christian, Onesimus' status has changed.
 - His relationship with Philemon was no longer just that of owner and slave, now they were brothers in Christ.
 - *So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. (vv. 17-21)*
 - Paul is not necessarily asking Philemon to set Onesimus free - in all likelihood, Onesimus was a slave for financial reasons. He probably owed Philemon money ...and he had stolen more when he ran away.
 - Paul is asking for something perhaps more difficult - he wants Philemon to forgive Onesimus and accept him as a brother in Christ.
 - Paul knew how important this was because of the way he was seen when he first accepted Christ, "In

Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.' 'Lord,' Ananias answered, 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.' But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'" (Acts 9:10-16)

- Closing (vv. 22-25).
And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
 - Paul and Philemon must have been close friends - not only is Paul asking him to forgive his runaway slave, but he is inviting himself to stay at Philemon's house!
 - He mentions *Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas* and *Luke* - we know some of these people:
 - *Epaphras* was probably the pastor of the church in Colossae and is mentioned in the Book of Colossians.
 - *Mark* was Barnabas' nephew who went with them on the First Missionary Journey, but got homesick and left them (Acts 13:13). When Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance Paul was against it and this caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40). Apparently, Mark redeemed himself in Paul's eyes because now he was with him in Rome. In addition, he wrote the Gospel of Mark, taking dictation from Peter.
 - *Luke* was a Gentile convert to Christianity who traveled with Paul and wrote the Gospel of Luke, as well as the Book of Acts.