

UNION BETHEL AME CHURCH BIBLE STUDY
DIAL – NUMBER: (425) 436-6260 ACCESS CODE: 141997#
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Tuesday, December 1, 2020 6:30 – 7:30 PM
An Exposition of the Epistle of St Paul to
PHILEMON

Introduction

This epistle to Philemon is placed last of those with the name of Paul's writings. Perhaps because it is the shortest, and of an argument peculiar and different from all the others, yet inspired by the Spirit of God. This epistle was one of its kind, and was be very instructive and useful in the churches. The occasion of it was this: --Philemon, one of note and probably a minister in the church of Colossae, a city of Phrygia, had a servant name Onesimus who has left his goods, ran away from him, and in his rambles, came to Rome, where Paul was then a prisoner. There the gospel, providentially came under his preaching, and by the blessing of God, Onesimus was converted to Christ. Onesimus ministered awhile to the apostle in bonds, and might have been further useful to him, but Paul understanding Onesimus to be another man's servant, Paul would not allow this, without Philemon's consent. Paul sends Onesimus back with this letter, where he earnestly seeks for the pardon of Onesimus and for kind reception by Philemon.

Chapter 1

Verses 1-7

Apostolic Salutations Gratitude on Philemon's Behalf. A.D. 62

- 1) Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,**
- 2) And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:**
- 3) Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 4) I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,**
- 5) Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints**

- 6) That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.**
- 7) For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the spirits of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.**

Paul, the apostle, who calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. To be a prisoner simply is no comfort nor honor but such as Paul was, for the faith and preaching of the gospel, this was true glory, and proper to move Philemon upon the request made to him by Paul. A petition from one suffering for Christ and his gospel would surely be tenderly regarded by a believer and minister of Christ, especially when strengthened too with the concurrence of Timothy, one eminent in the church, sometimes called by Paul, his son in the faith, but now it is likely grown more in years, he now refers to him as his brother. What could be denied to two such petitioners? Paul is not slight in serving a poor convert, and he gets all the additional help he can in it.

The persons written to are Philemon and Apphia, and with them Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house. Philemon, the master of Onesimus, was the principal, to whom the letter is written, the head of the church family, in whom were the authority and power of taking in or shutting out, and whose property Onesimus was. To Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow-labourer a good man he was, and probably a minister, and on both accounts dearly beloved by Paul. A lover of good men is one attribute of a good minister, and especially must love those who labor with them in the work of the gospel, and who are faithful therein. The general calling as Christians knit those together who are Christian, but when conjunction in the special calling as ministers is added, this will be further endearing. Paul, the apostle, the highest degree of ministry not only calls Timothy, an evangelist, his brother, but Philemon, an ordinary pastor, his dearly beloved fellow-laborer – an example of humility, condescension, and of all affectionate regards. Even in those that are highest in the church, towards others that are labors in the same special heavenly calling. Apphia is joined, as the yoke-fellow of Philemon, having a concern in the domestic affairs, the apostle directs to her likewise. She was a party offended and injured by Onesimus and therefore proper to be taken notice of in a letter for reconciliation and forgiveness. Justice and prudence would direct Paul to this express notice of

her, who might be helpful in furthering the good ends of his writing. The less principal are Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house. Because of the close friendship between Philemon and Archippus, Paul may have viewed him as helpful in peace making and forgiveness, and may be why he was included in this letter. Paul referred to Philemon as his fellow-laborer. Ministers must look on themselves as laborers and soldiers, who must therefore take pains, and endure hardship. They must stand on their guard, and make good their post, they must look on one another as fellow-laborer, and fellow-soldiers, must stand together, and strengthen one another's hands and hearts in any work of their holy function and calling. They need to see to it that they be provided with spiritual weapons, and skill to use them as laborers they must minister the Word, and sacraments, and discipline, and watch over souls, as those that must give an account of them and, as soldiers, they must fight the Lord's battles, and not entangle themselves in the things of this life. They must attend to the pleasing of him who hath chosen them to be soldiers. Onesimus was secretive about his misconduct, until his flight discovered him. Hearts are unknown but to God, until overt acts discover them.

Paul writes this letter very generally, so that all might be the more ready to own and receive this poor convert, and to behave affectionately towards him. Paul's salutation of those mentioned, he says, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the token in every epistle the apostle writes. He is a heart well-wisher to all his friends, and wishes for them the best things, not gold, nor silver, nor any earthly good, in the first or chief place, but grace and peace from God in Christ he cannot give them himself, but he prays for them from Him who can bestow this upon them. The apostle's benediction is full: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all, Amen. Paul expresses the affection he had for Philemon, by thanksgiving and prayer to God on his behalf, and the great joy for the many good things he knew and heard to be in Philemon. Paul's thanksgiving and prayer for Philemon are here set forth by the report, circumstance, and matter of them, with the way whereby much of the knowledge of Philemon's goodness came to him. Paul thanks God for what he has heard of him, and marks expressions of it in Philemon. Paul praises God and gives thanks for love that Philemon has for all the saints. Paul brings to the light Onesimus, and refers to him as a poor converted slave. He encourages the church and Philemon that

they must love him, as God does, for all saints. The apostle reminds Philemon of the reports that he has heard of the love and faith, which they had towards the Lord Jesus, and towards all the saints. Paul joins in his prayer praises and thanksgiving, reminding Philemon of the fruits of his faith and love growing, so that the communication of them would lead others to notice the light shining before men that they may see their good works, and be inspired to imitate them, and bring glory unto God. Paul adds that the reason for his prayer and his praises is that they have great joy and consolation in thy love, because our spirits are refreshed by thee, my brother. The good that has been done and still being done by Philemon brings joy and comfort to Paul and to others.

Why is it necessary for Paul to edify Philemon and let him know how proud he is of his labor of love and faith before asking a big favor of him?

Verses 8-25

The Apostle's Plea for Onesimus & Salutations

- 8) Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,
- 9) Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
- 10) I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:
- 11) Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:
- 12) Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, as you would receive me;
- 13) Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel;
- 14) But without thy mind would I do nothing that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.
- 15) For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou should receive him as a brother forever;
- 16) Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh and in the Lord;
- 17) If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself;
- 18) If he has wronged you, or owes thee, put that on my account;
- 19) I Paul have written it with my own hand, I will repay it; and I do not say to you, how thou owes unto me;
- 20) Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord; refresh my spirit in the Lord;
- 21) Having confidence in thy obedience I write unto thee, knowing that thou will also do more than I am asking of you;
- 22) But withal prepare me also lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you;
- 23) There salute Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;
- 24) Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellowlaborers
- 25) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Why was Paul confident that Philemon would receive Onesimus and do more for him than he was requesting?