

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL
TO
PHILEMON

OUTLINE

- I. Introduction—vv. 1-3
- II. A slave reborn to be a brother—vv. 4-16
- III. A brother recommended for the new man's acceptance—
vv. 17-22
- IV. Conclusion—vv. 23-25

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON

Author: Paul the apostle with Timothy the brother (v. 1).

Time of Writing: Approximately A.D. 64, shortly before Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment (vv. 9, 22).

Place of Writing: A Roman prison; see verses in the previous item.

Recipients: Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church, which was in their house (vv. 1-2).

Subject:
An Illustration of the Believers' Equal Status
in the New Man

I. Introduction

vv. 1-3

1^a Philem.
9;
Eph.
3:1

1^b 1 Tim.
1:2;
1 Thes.
1:1;
3:2

1^c Philem.
24;
Rom.
16:3,
21

2^a Rom.
16:1

2^b Col.
4:17

2^c Phil.
2:25

2^d Rom.
16:5;

1 Cor.
16:19;

Col.
4:15

4^a Rom.
1:8

4^b Eph.
1:16

1 Paul, a ^aprisoner of Christ Jesus, and ^bTimothy the brother, to Philemon our beloved and ^cfellow worker

2 And to ¹Apphia the ^asister and to ^{1b}Archippus our ^cfellow soldier and to the ^{2d}church, which is in your house:

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

II. A Slave Reborn to Be a Brother

vv. 4-16

4 I ^athank my God always, making ^bmention of you in my prayers,

5 Hearing of your ¹love and the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and to all the saints,

2¹ According to the familial nature of this Epistle, Apphia must have been Philemon's wife, and Archippus, his son.

2² Philemon lived in Colossae (v. 2 cf. Col. 4:17; v. 10 cf. Col. 1:2; 4:9) and according to history was an elder of the church there. It must have been that the church in Colossae met in his house. Hence, it was the church in his house.

5¹ In the initial stage of the life of a believer, faith comes first, and then, out of faith, love is produced (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; see notes 14² in 1 Tim. 1 and 23² in Eph. 6). But here love is mentioned first and then faith, because the matter of the equal status of the believers, dealt with in this Epistle, is a matter of love, which comes out of faith. In the new man the members love one another in faith (Titus 3:15).

6 That the fellowship of your faith may become effective in the ¹full ^aknowledge of ²every good thing which is in ³you ⁴for Christ.

7 ¹For I had much ^ajoy and ^bencouragement over your love, because the ^{2c}inward parts of the saints have been ^{3d}refreshed through you, ^ebrother.

8 Therefore though I have much ^aboldness in Christ to ^bcharge you what is ^cfitting,

9 Because of love I rather ^aentreat, being such a one as Paul ¹the aged and now also a ^{2b}prisoner of Christ Jesus.

10 I entreat you concerning my ^achild, whom I have ^{1b}begotten in my ^cbonds, ^{2d}Onesimus,

11 Who formerly was ¹useless to you but now is ²useful both to you and to me.

Their relationship is of love through faith. The apostle appreciated the fellowship of Philemon's faith (v. 6) and was encouraged by his love (v. 7); thus, he entreated Philemon to receive Onesimus because of this love (v. 9). These two virtues are referred to in combination here; Philemon had both of them, not only toward the Lord but also to all the saints.

6¹ I.e., full acknowledgment, full appreciation, and full recognition through experience.

6² Not natural things (cf. Rom. 7:18) but spiritual and divinely good things, such as the love and the faith that Philemon had toward the Lord Jesus. These good things are in us, the regenerated believers, but are not in natural men.

6³ Some ancient MSS read, us.

6⁴ Lit., unto, toward. All the spiritual and divinely good things in us are unto Christ, toward Christ, for Christ. The apostle prayed that the fellowship, the communication, the sharing of Philemon's faith toward all the saints might become effective in them in the element and sphere of the full knowledge, the full realization, of all the good things in us for Christ, causing them to acknowledge, appreciate, and recognize all the spiritual and divinely good things that are in the believers for Christ.

7¹ For introduces the reason that the apostle prayed for Philemon's faith to become effective in the saints (v. 6), the reason being that Philemon's love had refreshed the inward parts of the saints and, hence, had rendered the apostle much joy and encouragement.

7² Lit., bowels.

7³ Soothed, cheered.

9¹ Or, an ambassador (Eph. 6:20).

9² Prisoner here, fellow prisoner in v. 23, and bonds in v. 13 indicate that this Epistle was written during the apostle's first imprisonment in Rome. See note 6² in 2 Tim. 4.

10¹ Through the Spirit with the eternal life of God (John 3:3; 1:13).

10² The name in Greek means *profitable, useful, helpful*; it was a common name for slaves. He was Philemon's purchased bondslave, who, according to Roman law, had no human rights. He ran away from his master, thus committing a crime punishable by death. While he was in prison at Rome with the apostle, he was saved through him. Now the apostle sent him back with this Epistle to his master.

11¹ Or, unserviceable. Referring to Onesimus's running away from Philemon.

11² Or, serviceable. Because Onesimus had been converted and was willing to return to Philemon.

6^a Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9; 3:10
7^a Phil. 2:2
7^b 2 Cor. 7:4, 13; Col. 4:11
7^c Philem. 12, 20
7^d Philem. 20; 2 Tim. 1:16
7^e Philem. 20, 16; Matt. 23:8; Luke 22:32; John 21:23; Gal. 6:18; Rev. 1:9
8^a 2 Cor. 3:12
8^b 1 Tim. 1:18
8^c Eph. 5:4
9^a Rom. 12:1
9^b Philem. 1
10^a 1 Tim. 1:2
10^b 1 Cor. 4:14-15; Gal. 4:19
10^c Philem. 13; Phil. 1:7
10^d Col. 4:9

12 Him I have sent back to you—him, that is, my ¹very heart—

13 Whom I intended to keep with myself that on your behalf he might minister to me in the ^abonds of the gospel.

14 But ¹without your mind I did not want to do anything, that your goodness would ^anot be as of necessity, but ^bvoluntary.

15 ¹For ²perhaps for this reason he was separated *from* you for but an hour, that you might ³fully have him forever,

16 ¹No longer as a ^aslave, but ²above a slave, a ³beloved ^bbrother, especially to me, but how much more to you, ⁴both ^cin the flesh and in the Lord.

III. A Brother Recommended for
the New Man's Acceptance
vv. 17-22

17 If then ¹you hold me as a ^{2a}partner, receive him as myself.

12¹ Lit., bowels; as in vv. 7, 20 (*inward parts*), Phil. 1:8 (*inward parts*), Phil. 2:1 (*tenderheartedness*), and Col. 3:12 (*inward parts*), signifying inward affection, tenderheartedness, compassions. Paul's inward affection and compassions went with Onesimus to Philemon.

14¹ Just as the Lord would not do anything without our consent.

15¹ *For* introduces the reason for the sending in v. 12.

15² *Perhaps* is not only an expression of humility but also an expression that shows no prejudice.

15³ Possess him entirely.

16¹ This short Epistle serves the special purpose of showing us the equality, in God's eternal life and divine love, of all the members in the Body of Christ. In the semisavage age of Paul, the life of Christ had annulled, among the believers, the strong institution of slavery. Since the sentiment of the love of the Christian fellowship was so powerful and prevailing, that the evil social order among fallen mankind was spontaneously ignored, any need for institutional emancipation was obviated. Because of the divine birth and because they were living by the divine

life, all the believers in Christ had equal status in the church, which was the new man in Christ and in which there was no discrimination between free and bond (Col. 3:10-11). This was based on three facts: (1) Christ's death on the cross abolished the ordinances of the different ways of life, for the creating of the one new man (Eph. 2:15); (2) we all were baptized into Christ and were made one in Him without any differences (Gal. 3:27-28); and (3) in the new man Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:11). Such a life with such a love in equal fellowship is well able to maintain good order in the church (in Titus), carry out God's economy concerning the church (in 1 Timothy), and stand against the tide of the church's decline (in 2 Timothy). It is of the Lord's sovereignty that in the arrangement of the New Testament this Epistle was positioned after the three preceding books.

16² Or, more than a slave. Onesimus was even more than a free man—he was a beloved brother.

16³ *A beloved brother* here, *the sister* (v. 2), *our beloved and fellow worker* (v. 1), *our fellow soldier* (v. 2), *my fellow workers* (v. 24), *my fellow prisoner* (v. 23), and a *partner* (v. 17)

13^a Philem.
10

14^a 2 Cor.
9:7;
1 Pet.
5:2

14^b cf. Rom.
12:8

16^a 1 Cor.
7:22

16^b Philem.
7;
Col.
4:9;
1 Tim.
6:2

16^c Eph.
6:5;
Col.
3:22

17^a 2 Cor.
8:23

18 And if he has ¹wronged you in anything or owes *anything*, charge that to ²my account.

19 I, Paul, have written with my ^aown hand: I will ¹repay; not to say to you that you owe me even ²your own self besides.

20 Yes, ^abrother, may I have ¹profit from you in the Lord; ^{2b}refresh my ³inward parts in Christ.

21 Having ^aconfidence in your obedience, I have written to you, knowing that you will do even beyond the things that I say.

22 And at the same time also prepare me a ^alodging, for I ¹hope that through your ^bprayers I will be ²graciously ^cgiven to you.

IV. Conclusion vv. 23-25

23 ^{1a}Epaphras, my ^bfellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you;

24 As do ^aMark, ^bAristarchus, ^cDemas, ^dLuke, my ^efellow workers.

25 The ^{1a}grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your ^{2b}spirit.³

are all intimate terms, indicating the apostle's intimate sentiment concerning his relationship with the members in the new man.

16⁴ I.e., in the flesh as a slave and in the Lord as a brother. In the flesh Onesimus was a brother as a slave, and in the Lord he was a slave as a brother.

17¹ Just as a local church with its elders is in partnership with the Lord, and the Lord entrusts to them the newly saved ones, as the good Samaritan did with the healed one (Luke 10:33-35).

17² This indicates the deep relationship of fellowship in the Lord.

18¹ This indicates that Onesimus had defrauded his master.

18² In caring for Onesimus, Paul did exactly what the Lord does for us.

19¹ Just as the Lord pays everything for His redeemed.

19² This indicates that Philemon had been saved through Paul himself.

20¹ Gk. *onaimen*, similar in sound

to *Onesimus* (both words meaning *profitable*). Here, this word is an allusion to the name Onesimus. This is a play on words, implying that since "you owe me even your own self, you are an Onesimus to me—hence, you should be profitable to me, i.e., should let me have profit from you in the Lord."

20² Soothe, cheer.

20³ Lit., bowels, as in v. 7. Since Philemon had refreshed the inward parts of the saints, his partner now asked him to do the same for him in the Lord.

22¹ This expectation, that he would be liberated from his imprisonment and visit the churches again, is expressed also in Phil. 1:25 and 2:24.

22² Paul considered that his visit would be a gracious gift to the church.

23¹ A contraction of *Epaphroditus* (Phil. 2:25; 4:18).

25¹ The apostle always greeted the recipients of his Epistles, in both the opening and the conclusion, with the

19^a 1 Cor.
16:21;
Gal.
6:11

20^a Philem.
7

20^b Philem.
7

21^a 2 Cor.
2:3

22^a Acts
28:23

22^b 2 Cor.
1:11;
Phil.
1:19

22^c Heb.
13:19

23^a Col.
1:7;
4:12

23^b Rom.
16:7;
Col.
4:10

24^a Acts
12:12,
25;
Col.
4:10

24^b Acts
19:29;
Col.
4:10

24^c Col.
4:14;
2 Tim.
4:10

24^d Col.
4:14;
2 Tim.
4:11

24^e Philem.
1

25^a Gal.
6:18;
Phil.
4:23

25^b 2 Tim.
4:22

grace of the Lord. This shows that he trusted in the Lord's grace, being confident that this grace would enable them, as well as himself (1 Cor. 15:10), to accomplish what he wrote to them. No human effort avails for

the accomplishing of a revelation as high as the completing revelation of the apostle Paul—for this the Lord's grace is needed.

25² See note 18² in Gal. 6.

25³ Some ancient MSS add, Amen.

**THE
NEW TESTAMENT**

Recovery Version

Text translated by:
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First edition 1985
Revised edition 1991

Library of Congress Catalog
Card Number: 91-75483

ISBN 1-57593-907-X (economy edition, black)
ISBN 1-57593-394-2 (economy edition, burgundy)

98 99 00 01 02 03 6 5 4 3

Published by:

Living Stream Ministry
1853 West Ball Road, Anaheim, California 92804
P. O. Box 2121, Anaheim, California 92814
United States of America

Printed in South Korea