

Philemon – Pt. 1
A Letter from a Dear Friend

Big Idea – The more your faith benefits you, the more you want to give it to benefit others.

Philemon 1:1 This letter is from Paul, a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy. I am writing to Philemon, our beloved co-worker, and to our sister Apphia, and to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets in your house.

3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

4 I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon,

5 because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people.

6 And I am praying that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

7 Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

Here's the backstory: Paul was a prisoner in Rome, his friend Philemon was in Colossae, and the human link between them was a runaway slave named Onesimus. The details aren't clear, but it appears that Onesimus robbed his master and then fled to Rome, hoping to be swallowed up in the crowded city. But, in the providence of God, he met Paul and was converted! The primary theme of this letter is "be someone who forgives"

1. Paul and his friends – vs. 1, 2

Paul names Timothy briefly but the bulk of the letter was from the heart of Paul to the heart of Philemon. He calls Philemon his beloved friend and co-worker. Later in the letter vs. 19, he mentions that Philemon owed him a debt – his salvation.

Philemon 1:19 "...I won't mention that you owe me your very soul!"

Apphia - the wife of Philemon

Along with the letter to the believers in Colossae which we know as Colossians, this letter probably was carried to Colossae by Tychicus and Onesimus.

Colossians 4:7 “Tychicus is my dear brother in Christ and a faithful minister and servant with me in the Lord. He will tell you all the things that are happening to me.

8 This is why I am sending him: so you may know how we are and he may encourage you.

9 I send him with Onesimus, a faithful and dear brother in Christ, and one of your group. They will tell you all that has happened here.

Paul had not started the church in Colossae and never visited it (Col. 1:1-8; 2:1). It is likely that the church started as a result of his ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10, 20, 26) and that Epaphras was the founding pastor (Phile. 23). The church met in the home of Philemon and Apphia, his wife. The New Testament churches met in homes (Rom. 16:5, 23; 1 Cor. 16:19), and perhaps the church in Philemon's house was one of two assemblies in Colossae (Col. 4:15).

Who was Archippus? - Some people assume that Archippus was their son, but this is not certain. He may have been the elder who took the place of Epaphras who had gone to Rome to help Paul. If this is true, then it would explain Paul's strong admonition to Archippus in Colossians 4:17, even though this was a letter written to the whole church.

2. Grace and peace – vs. 3

Paul's standard greeting in all 13 of his NT letters.

It highlighted salvation's means (grace) and results (peace) and linked the Father and the Son, so affirming again the Deity of Jesus Christ that He was God.

Ephesians 2:8, 9 “For by grace are you saved through faith...”

Everyone needs grace – Martin Luther said, “We are all Onesimuses”

Romans 5:1 “Since we were justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...”

3. The Christian character of Philemon – vs. 4 – 7

Paul prayed regularly thanking God for his friend – vs. 4 “I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon,”

He commended his love and faith toward the Lord and all his fellow believers – vs. 5 “because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love

for all of God's people."

He prayed that he would be active in sharing his faith – vs. 6 "And I pray that you will become active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

He commended his generous heart – vs. 7 "Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people."

Paul wanted Philemon to become like him in sharing his faith. How did Onesimus come to faith in Christ? Paul lead him to the Lord – we're not told the circumstances of how it happened but somehow in the prison, Onesimus came into contact with Paul and got saved! God arranged it and Paul was ready.

1 Peter 3:15 "But honor Christ as the Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have with gentleness and respect."

When Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, each crisis becomes an opportunity for witness. We are "ready always to give an answer."

Our English word apology comes from the Greek word translated "answer," but it does not mean "to say I am sorry." Rather, it means "a defense presented in court." "Apologetics" is the branch of theology that deals with the defense of the faith.

Every Christian should be able to give a reasoned defense of his hope in Christ, especially in hopeless situations. A crisis creates the opportunity for witness when a believer behaves with faith and hope, because the unbelievers will then sit up and take notice.

This witness must be given "with gentleness and [respect]" and not with arrogance and a know-it-all attitude. We are witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys! We must also be sure that our lives back up our defense.

Peter did not suggest that Christians argue with lost people, but rather that we present to the unsaved an account of what we believe and why we believe it, in a loving manner. The purpose is not to win an argument but to win lost souls to Christ.

What does it mean to "honor Christ as Lord" in our hearts?

It means to turn everything over to Him, and to live only to please Him and glorify Him. It means to fear displeasing Him rather than fear what men might do to us.

This approach simplifies our lives! It combines Matthew 6:33 and Romans 12:1-2 into a daily attitude of faith that obeys God's Word in spite of consequences.

It means being satisfied with nothing less than the will of God in our lives

John 4:34 "Jesus explained: "My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work."

One evidence that Jesus Christ is Lord in our lives is the readiness with which we witness to others about Him and seek to win them to Christ.