

Paul's Letter to Philemon (An Introduction)

We begin a new study today... Paul's letter to a man named Philemon. I would recommend you take a few moments to read the entire letter (only 25 verses) several times before we begin. This helps to get the whole story in your head at the beginning of the study.

Let's take a look at the first couple of verses as a way of introduction.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother. To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home. (1-2)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

- I. (From) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy our brother.
 - A. To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker
 - B. To Apphia our sister
 - C. To Archippus our fellow soldier
 - D. To the church that meets in Philemon's home

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother. - Paul is the author of this letter and Timothy is there with him, consenting to the contents of the letter. In verses 9 and 13 Paul affirms that he is a literal prisoner (living in a jail) because of his ministry for Christ.

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, - Philemon is a close friend of Paul and Timothy. He is also a Christian who is participating in the work of God's Kingdom (fellow worker). Most scholars believe that Apphia is Philemon's wife.

...to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home. - The term "fellow soldier" would refer to a fellow minister. Archippus seems to be Philemon's pastor. This letter is also addressed to Philemon's church, who met in his home. Personal homes were the most common locations for local churches at that time.

The occasion for Paul's letter is to address a problem within Philemon's family (we will look at the problem tomorrow). Since this

involved a family matter, it would only be right to address this letter to his wife, as well. But notice that Paul also included Philemon and Apphia's pastor, as well as, their church family.

The way these phrases are worded in the Greek language means the letter is primarily addressed to Philemon. Then Paul includes Philemon's wife, pastor, and church family signifying he wants them to see the contents of this letter and to be part of the solution Paul will introduce to Philemon later in the letter.

It would be similar to the idea in our day when we email someone and then carbon copy (CC) someone else because we want the other person to know we have had this conversation with the first person and we also want him to see the contents of that conversation.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH IT?

1. First, notice the context in which Paul helps a fellow Christian deal with a serious problem. Paul calls Philemon a "dear friend and fellow worker". We highlighted this same idea when we were studying 3 John. Here is the principle: **Personal problems are better solved when you have close Christian friendships in which there are genuine love and appreciation for each other.**

When we encounter problems and weaknesses in each other, because we have lived life together and served our Lord together, we have better "earned the right" to speak to each other at the deeper levels. This is exactly what is happening with Paul and Philemon.

This is why I am so adamant about creating opportunities for the believers in our church family to get together and build stronger friendships. It is God's will that we play a significant role in each other's lives. Part of that role is to encourage each other to walk in the truth (Hebrews 10:24-25, I Thess. 5:11).

2. Second, notice that Paul expects Philemon and Apphia to be accountable to their church family. Much of our Christian culture in America today is so individualistic. Many feel that what happens in their personal lives as a Christian is personal and does not concern the family of God. We have believed this so strongly and for so long that when we see how the early church functioned it seems strange to us.

But if we are going to allow the Scriptures to tell us how to live the way God wants us to live, we must come to grips with what Paul is

saying to Philemon and Apphia. Here is the principle: **What a Christian does as an individual does affect the family of God. We are to be accountable to each other and responsible for each other.** We have the same Father, the same Savior, and the same Holy Spirit living within us. We are called to live out the same truth as revealed in the same Scriptures. We have a lot in common, don't we?

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:12-31), taught this concept. He said...just like my own body is one body but has many members (arms, legs, eyes, teeth, etc.) so is Christ's body. We are all part of His body but all have a different function. For instance, each member of my body has an important role and if a particular member doesn't work properly it makes my whole body suffer and not be able to function as it was designed to do.

It is the same for those of us who are part of the body of Christ. If one member does not live in truth (doesn't work properly) then it affects the body, making the body (other Christians) suffer and not be able to function as it was designed to function.

To live in a thriving relationship with God is to also live in a right relationship with His people (1 John 2:9-11; 4:20-21). When we love and trust each other in the Spirit, this is pleasing to God. When we trust that God is Sovereign and when we trust Him to lead us, even as we follow the leadership of others, we are on the good and right path.

How is your relationship with Christ's church going? Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you learning to function in cooperation with them? This is very important to God. Why don't you talk with Him about that today?

Pastor Will

Will Mackey
Day 2

Paul's Letter to Philemon (An Introduction...continued)

THE CONTEXT:

You will remember from yesterday, Paul was writing a personal note to Philemon regarding an issue that happened in Philemon's household. Paul, in essence, carbon copied (cc) this letter to Philemon's wife, his pastor, and his church family. They would all be part of the solution that Paul would recommend later in the letter.

Before we look at verse 3, let me give a quick overview of the letter and try to piece the parts of the puzzle together by using other Biblical letters.

It appears that Philemon lived in the city of Colosse. A man named Tychicus delivered this letter to Philemon, and also delivered Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:7-9, 17) on the same trip.

It seems that Philemon had a slave named Onesimus (Philemon 16) who ran away and possibly stole some of Philemon's possessions in the process (18). As Onesimus ran away, he ended up in the area of Caesarea where Paul was being held as a prisoner (Acts 23:23-35). As God's providence would have it, Onesimus came in contact with Paul's associates and was introduced to Paul. Paul introduced Onesimus to Christ (Philemon 10, 16) and he began to help in Paul's ministry (11).

Although Paul became very fond of Onesimus (12), he came to understand Onesimus's past and the conflict that remained between Philemon and Onesimus. He sent Onesimus back to Philemon, accompanied by this letter, so the two could reconcile and obey the Law of Christ (12-14). Perhaps Paul anticipated Philemon's struggle with reconciliation and therefore used this occasion and letter to teach how a Christian could respond in love to a difficult situation (16-17).

Now, let's look at our verse for today!

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

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Let's break it down.

- I. From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...
 - A. may grace come to you
 - B. may peace come to you

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Before Paul began to teach Philemon, he prayed for Philemon and shared his prayer for him in the format of a blessing. He said, "*Grace to you...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" - Tough situations call for tough tools!

Before I became a pastor I was a heavy equipment mechanic. I worked on bulldozers, front end loaders, and the like. Whenever we repaired those big machines, we would often need specialized tools... specialized particularly in the area of size. For instance, I had a wrench that was 6 feet long and weighed 50lbs. Tough situations call for tough tools!

Paul knew that Philemon would be tempted in his response to Onesimus to employ anger, bitterness, or secular justice. So right at the beginning of the letter Paul prays that Philemon will have grace from the Father and Son. The word Paul uses and the concept Paul prays is the word "charis". It means graciousness, the gift of grace, and the divine influence upon the heart. Grace...a tough tool to help us live Godly lives. Grace...a tough tool needed in tough situations.

I was visiting a friend yesterday and we were talking about this very thing. He and his family are walking through a tremendous challenge in life right now. This is perhaps the biggest thing they have had to face. And yet he and his wife testified to the grace of God. They declared over and over that God had given the gift of grace to them. They said that our Father had influenced their hearts, causing them to be able to walk in the provision He provided and to feel secure through it all. This is what Paul wanted for Philemon.

They also testified to God's amazing peace (which is what Paul mentions next). "*...and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" - Not only does Paul pray for our Father and His Son to give Philemon "*grace*", he also prays for Them to give him "*peace*". The word and concept Paul uses is from the word "eirene". It means to join (to make peace), to set at one again, quietness, and rest. Paul prayed

that Philemon would be filled with God's peace as he worked through the issue with Onesimus. He wanted Philemon's heart to experience a quiet rest in God's sovereignty so that he could make choices that would allow this relationship to be restored and be better than it was before (15-16).

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

The truth is...when it comes to dealing with people who have in one way or another injured us...we need help. Without God...the job is too big. Our resources are too thin. Our motives are lacking. Our desires fall short. Our circumstances often control us. The business of forgiveness and reconciliation is a God-size job.

The principle for today is this.

1. When we have been wronged by someone else, we must realize that for us to respond in a way that will please the Lord and will cause us to mature...we must first pray for and employ the resources of God.

Only when we have God's grace and peace actively at work within us will we be able to respond with love and reconciliation. If we will ask, God will give us the gifts of grace and peace. His Spirit will so fill our hearts and minds that we will be able to walk through any circumstance in obedience and certain victory.

Are you going through a situation that is too big for you? Are you faced with a problem of responding to a hurtful circumstance caused by some else? Don't try to get through it by yourself. You need God's Presence and God's Resources. You need His grace and peace. Please...go to Him today. Call out to Him and He will answer.

May you live every moment of every day in the equipping presence of your Father and your Lord Jesus.

Pastor Will

Paul's Letter to Philemon

⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. ⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. ⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints. (4-7)

If you have something hard to say to someone, how would you do it? Would you blurt it out? Cut to the chase? Just plow through the problem to set things straight? Not Paul.

Paul was one of the greatest problem solvers of all time and yet he does not blurt, cut, or plow to accomplish God's will. Paul relates. Paul loves, encourages, and builds up. He understands that even in the act of correcting or challenging someone...it is all about loving...encouraging...and building up. Let's take a look.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Let's outline our passage for today. Remember...this helps our eyes see what is written... in a different format. It helps our minds grasp, in smaller pieces, what the text says.

- I. I (Paul) always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers
 - A. because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus
 - B. because I hear about your love for all the saints
 - C. I pray you may be active in sharing your faith so you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.
 - D. your love (for the saints) has given me great joy
 - E. your love has given me encouragement because you have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. -
Paul begins this letter much like he begins most of his letters. Paul is an encourager. He always begins with a positive.

He told Philemon what he says to God about him. He told Philemon he (Paul) always thanked God for him. There are two specific things he highlights. (1) He thanked God for Philemon's faith in the Lord. Philemon had shown himself to be a man who trusted the Lord and was faithful to walk in the truth. (2) He thanked God for Philemon's love for the saints. Philemon had shown himself to be a person who loves other Christians. What a great reputation to have. What wonderful characteristics to be known for.

⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. - As Paul prays for Philemon, he not only thanked God for him but also asked God to help Philemon be active in sharing his faith. This phrase means more than simply telling his neighbor about Christ. It more fully refers to the bigger idea of influencing others toward the faith by way of several methods. It speaks to a lifestyle more than one particular act.

Notice what Paul said is a result of actively being about the work of the Kingdom. Paul seemed to say that to be active in influencing others for Christ would create opportunities for Philemon to gain a fuller understanding of all the good things we have access to in our relationship with Christ.

⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints. - Paul returned briefly to the expression of Philemon's love for the saints. Paul was filled with joy and encouragement because Philemon refreshed the hearts of Christians. He, like Paul, was also an encourager. He knew full well the enemy's relenting attack on believers. He knew they needed loved, encouraged, and restored. Paul was also going to challenge Philemon to love and encourage another believer named Onesimus.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

1. We have learned today that the vehicle of truth is relationships. We began today's study by asking the question, "If you have something hard to say to someone, how would you do it?" Paul had a difficult situation to talk over with Philemon. He needed to challenge Philemon to walk in truth. He would ask Philemon to commit to truth, even to the point of walking against the culture of his day. Paul began where we all should...from the point of relationship.

Paul told Philemon that he prayed for him...in specific ways. Paul told Philemon that he admired him for his love for God and mankind. He

said he has high spiritual hopes for him and that the way Philemon lived his life brought him (Paul) great joy and encouragement.

What was Paul doing? Paul was strengthening and reassuring his commitment in the relationship. And it was upon this realized commitment that Paul admonished Philemon to walk in truth. Paul has shown Philemon that the commitment he had for Philemon could be trusted. It was real...sincere...unmovable.

I wonder if we can take a lesson from Paul. There are times when we need to challenge those we love to walk in truth. There are times when we must correct and try to help someone make better choices.

How do we do it? Do we blurt, cut, or plow our way through it, letting emotion guide the way? We should begin by strengthening and reassuring the relationship and our commitment to it. We should take time to convey a real, unmovable love and commitment to the relationship and then, within that context, speak the truth in love.

Husbands to their wives, wives to their husbands, parents to their kids, family member to family member, bosses to their employees, and Christians to each other...we can all learn a valuable lesson from Paul today.

We've probably all heard the phrase, "A spoon full of sugar makes the medicine go down." The sugar covers up the taste of the medicine. The truth is so important to our lives but it can sometimes be painful (taste bad). But without it sin takes over. How truth is presented is crucial. If it is presented in the context of a solid relationship, it can cover up the bad taste of conviction.

Are you following this principle in your relationships right now?

May our Lord teach us how to build strong relationships so that we can effectively spur one another on in the truth.

Pastor Will

Paul's Letter to Philemon

⁸Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹²I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³I 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. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.

Now we come to the point of the letter. We saw Paul's greeting in verses 1-2, his prayer for Philemon in verses 3-6, and his encouragement to Philemon in verses 5-7. Paul now is ready to lay out the problem...the occasion for the letter...in verses 8-14.

As you remember, a slave named Onesimus had escaped from Philemon's household. Through God's providence, he made his way to where Paul was being held prisoner and was soon converted under Paul's ministry. *¹⁰I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.* - What should Paul do? We will deal with the whole idea of Christianity and slavery a little later on in the study.

According to the law of the land, Paul was holding property that belonged to another. In order for Paul to be a law abiding citizen he must return the slave to his owner. On the other hand, Paul lived by the laws of God and taught a higher Christian way that rejects those systems that do not treat men with the dignity given them by their Creator.

And then on the other hand (3 hands? ☺). *¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.* - As Philemon's spiritual mentor, Paul saw this as an opportunity to help Philemon grow and mature in his ability to follow Christ.

Paul admitted that Onesimus was useful to him in the ministry...*¹³I 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 Onesimus is

now very useful to Philemon because this whole episode forces Philemon to trust God at a new level and to grow spiritually...¹⁴*But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.* Paul wanted Philemon to look at this whole thing through the eyes of truth/love and then... make his own choice.

⁸*Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹yet I appeal to you on the basis of love.* - Paul, because of the history he had with Philemon, could have told him what to do. But Paul wanted Philemon to work through this and choose the way of love for himself.

WHAT DOES THIS SAY TO US?

1. Paul knew something we in the church today should grasp more effectively. Paul understood the process of discipleship. He realized that Christian growth and maturity happen over time. He also understood that growth and maturity don't happen by accident.

These come, not so much through a special moment in a worship service, as they do in the trenches of life. Spiritual growth and maturity are hammered out on the anvil of truth and tough choices. Remember what James taught us? *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* (James 1:2-4)

Too often I am tempted to short circuit the maturing process for myself and for others. But Paul knew better. He could have just told Philemon what to do and ended the whole thing right there. But he didn't. He let Philemon enter the process. He let him walk through the process...face the trial...have his faith tested...and be in a position where he had to persevere.

We want to learn spiritual lessons quickly. We desire to have someone tell us what we should think and do. However, if those are the only foundations upon which our faith is built, our faith will be incomplete.

According to James, it is actually good for us to struggle with things. It is better for us, in the long run, if spiritual things are not always made easy for us. It is healthy for us to work for things...to struggle for things...to trust God for things even when we can't feel Him or

understand what we are going through. These are the times when faith is forged deeply within us. These are the scenarios that make us strong and prepare us for the spiritual work that await us.

We shouldn't panic when we see someone struggle with faith issues. We should cover them in prayer and make truth (the Scriptures) readily available to them. If they are going to have a faith that is of any value they will need to walk through trials.

Perhaps you are the one walking through the trials today. Don't panic. Hang in there. Stay faithful. Saturate your mind with truth. It won't last forever. You will be stronger for going through it.

Or perhaps someone you love is walking through the trial today. Don't panic. Hang in there. Pray, pray, and pray some more. Keep truth in front of them. It won't last forever. They will be stronger for going through it.

Pastor Will

Paul's Letter to Philemon

¹⁵Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good— ¹⁶no 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 man and as a brother in the Lord. (15-16)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

- I. Perhaps the reason he (Onesimus) was separated from you was
 - A. so you might have him back for good.
 - B. no longer as a slave
 - C. but better than a slave, as a dear brother

- II. He is very dear to me (Paul) but even dearer to you
 - A. as a man
 - B. as a brother in the Lord

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Paul challenged Philemon to look at this whole episode through a different set of lenses - *¹⁵Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good.* Previously, Philemon saw this as a case of a slave breaking the law. He ran away and took things that didn't belong to him (18). Guilty! Case closed.

Paul challenged him to look through spiritual eyes...through eyes that could recognize God's providential hand upon a man's life...really two men's lives - *¹⁶no 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 man and as a brother in the Lord.* Paul said there was something better than slavery...and it was when you look at another man as your brother in Christ.

Notice the change in Paul's language. In verse 11 Paul talked about Onesimus being *"useless, useful"* to Philemon. In verse 16 he spoke of Onesimus as being *"dear, dearer"* to Philemon. Paul wanted Philemon to see Onesimus through the eyes of Christ and not through the eyes of his culture. Christ asks the same from us. He wants us to look at people through his perspective and not as our culture does.

The slavery mentioned in the New Testament was not exactly like what we read about in our own American history. Slavery was not as determined by race as it was by criminal status, war time status, or economic status. Many called slaves were people who were paying off debt they could not afford.

Nonetheless, the ownership of human beings is deplorable. But notice how Paul handled this subject. He does not create an "anti slavery" movement (although there is nothing wrong with this). He knew his job was to preach the gospel of Christ...not to get caught up in a cultural cause (no matter how worthy it would be). He wasn't "cause" oriented but "Gospel" oriented. Paul knew he had the answer to all social problems...to all the mistreatment of human beings.

Paul understood that if people could have a true encounter with Jesus Christ and His Gospel, their hearts would change. He knew that if they would begin to follow Christ and His Gospel, they would live in a relationship with God whereby they would constantly mature in their knowledge of Him and in their ability to live holy lives (like Philemon).

The Gospel can expose and eliminate the lies behind slavery... one person at a time (like with Philemon). The Gospel can bring light to every corner of our spiritually dark world. It can heal men's hearts and, consequently, all their relationships.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

1. When we encounter Christ and His Gospel we are changed. We suddenly see God in a different light. We see ourselves differently. We take responsibility for our sin and realize we cannot pay for it. We realize our lost condition and realize we cannot do anything about it on our own. We see others differently. Jesus refers to this encounter as being "*born again*" (John 3:3).

We don't enter the Kingdom gradually and without notice. We are purposeful about it. This encounter with Christ and His Gospel changes the way we live our lives and continues to mature us in this way all the days of our lives. This is part of the commitment we make to the Gospel.

Take Philemon for instance. He was a Christian and had been for a while. He co-labored with Paul in the Kingdom. But he had a blind spot. He had an area in which he did not have the mind of Christ in.

God, in His providence, arranged a circumstance in his life where by he could grow and mature in this area.

This happens to us today. Think for a moment. What are you going through right now that could be something God has created or allowed in order to mature you... to bring light to your blind spot?

Circumstances like these test believers. They tested Philemon and they test us today. They push us out of our comfortable lives and make us choose. They force us to decide whether we really want to follow Christ. They make us evaluate ourselves as to whether we love the idea of loving Christ or whether we really love the person of Christ. These types of circumstances help us think about whether we love the idea of embracing His Gospel or whether we really do love His Gospel.

The Christian life isn't always positive. It is really not about our emotional happiness. When God's truth is laid beside the fallen nature of man, man often groans and squirms. But the goal of God's Word and any legitimate person who teaches it, isn't to give us neat, easy, and comfortable concepts to live by. It is to help us love God with all of our hearts and to live holy lives. This is what God intended for us from the beginning.

Like Philemon, we need to be prepared to grow. God insists!

Pastor Will

Paul's Letter to Philemon

¹⁷So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Let's outline the passage.

- I. If you consider me a partner, (I want you to do this):
 - A. Welcome him (Onesimus) as you would welcome me.
 - B. Charge any debt he owes you to me. I will pay it back (I won't mention how much you owe me)
 - C. Refresh my heart in Christ.
 - D. I am confident of your obedience to Christ.
 - E. I know you will do even more than I ask.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Paul has spent some time greeting, praying, encouraging, and laying out the problem from God's point of view. Now he is ready to ask Philemon to respond. He said **five things** about Philemon's response.

¹⁷So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. - (1) Paul said that if Philemon considered Paul a partner in the work of the Kingdom, then he should welcome Onesimus in the same way he would welcome Paul himself if he were visiting. He was to welcome him with love, grace, and respect.

¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. - (2) Perhaps Onesimus took some things from Philemon when he ran away...things that he could turn into money for food and travel. Paul said he would cover the debt if that were the case. Philemon would be able to see on the letter from verse 18 to the end of the letter that the handwriting had changed.

Often Paul would dictate a letter to someone who would do the actual writing. Probably Timothy is writing down what Paul dictating for Philemon (verse 1). Other letters seem to indicate that Paul had contracted a disease and was having problems with his eyesight. Scholars speculate that it was Malaria that he had contracted through his many missionary travels. That's why others would do the writing for him. But in this letter, Paul wanted Philemon to notice that he had begun to write at that point and the promise he had just made to repay the debt was written with his own hand. He meant it.

The phrase that Philemon owed Paul his very self...could mean a number of things. Perhaps Paul led Philemon to the Lord or really helped him out in some big way. Paul was saying that he was willing to repay Onesimus' debt but that Philemon was indebted to Paul too.

²⁰*I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.* - (3) The third thing he requested is that Philemon's choice would refresh his heart. This idea is tied to the last. If Philemon was indebted to Paul, then one way he could repay Paul (*benefit from you*) would be to refresh his heart. He could make a choice regarding Onesimus that would bring joy to Paul's heart.

²¹*Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.* - (4) The fourth thing Paul wanted to say about this is that he is certain that Philemon will obey the Lord. He has watched him through the years and knows that if Philemon is given the truth...he will do the truth and obey the Lord.

(5) The fifth thing Paul said was, he was so sure of Philemon's character and love for the Lord/the saints (verse 5), he was certain that it would be in Philemon's heart to do more than Paul had thought to ask in this letter. True love motivates us to go beyond what is asked of us. Paul knew that Philemon would respond to the home coming of Onesimus better than Paul could imagine or ask.

Unfortunately, we don't have any reference to this situation again in any letter of the New Testament. We don't know how this story came out. I wonder how they united and what the relationship looked like after Onesimus returned?

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

1. The concept that stood out to me this morning comes in the text where Paul said that if Onesimus owed Philemon anything then Paul

would take care of the debt (18) and then when Paul said that Philemon owed Paul his very life (19).

This is a big truth that we must all consider when we deal with matters of forgiveness between people. The truth is this: *In the matter of giving and receiving mercy from others...we find ourselves both owed and owing.*

No earthly relationship is exempt from the need of mercy and compassion. From a family member to the closest friendship to a mere acquaintance ...all of these relationships need mercy given and received.

We need it in our marriages, our parenting, our work life, our friendships, with our neighbors and even with the guy who cuts us off in traffic. Every relationship needs the exchange of mercy and compassion. Why?

None of us are flawless. None of us have perfect knowledge, perfect understanding, perfect communication skills, perfect emotions, perfect backgrounds, or perfect actions. That is what Paul is reminding Philemon about in verses 18-19. Philemon was owed by Onesimus but Philemon also owed Paul.

It is humbling. This truth adjusts our attitudes quickly, doesn't it? It has the power to help us see the person who hurt us in a whole new light. When we are tempted to withhold mercy and compassion from someone else we would do well to remember that each of us is the recipient of incredible compassion and mercy already. Someone may have hurt us but chances are in our lifetime we have hurt someone too and needed mercy.

May our Lord help us to treat others the way He has treated us (Matthew 18:21-35).

Have a great day.

Pastor Will

Paul's Letter to Philemon

"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." (22-25)

I hope your day has gotten off to a great start. Paul's letter to Philemon has given us a lot to think about, hasn't it? Well, let's get started in today's study.

WHAT DOES IT SAY/MEAN?

Paul's final words to Philemon are positive and filled with the hope of seeing him again. *And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.* He told Philemon he should prepare a guest room for him. Perhaps Paul had heard some news from the courts or the guards that his release was soon in coming.

Nonetheless, he was excited about the possibility. This news may have served as an addition motivator to Philemon regarding the Onesimus issue. If Paul was coming to visit, Philemon would want to have the matter well in hand.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. Epaphras is mentioned again in Colossians 4:12. He is from Colosse and is described as "wrestling in prayer" for the Colossians. Mark is the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). Aristarchus is mentioned in Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2, and Col. 4:10. Demas is mentioned in Col.4:14 and 2 Timothy 4:10.

I recommend taking a few minutes and looking up these references. They will give you a much better perspective on these men and the roles they played in the early church. Luke, of course, is a physician, who traveled with Paul, and wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your Spirit. Paul ends with a similar prayer like he began the letter with (3). He prays that the grace of the Lord Jesus will be with Philemon's spirit. He wants Philemon to be ministered to by God's grace and for him to make choices that are empowered by that same grace.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THIS?

1. The list of names Paul mentions at the end of his letter were true greetings sent to Philemon. But there was more to it than that. These greetings serve the same purpose as the names at the beginning do. Paul wanted Philemon to be reminded that he is part of a community of faith and that other members of that community are aware of the issue he is working through and are watching his response.

He wanted Philemon to know that his choice in this matter would impact other lives and the faith of others. It was important that he chose truth and the community was insisting upon it.

2. It should be noted that the principles of the Gospel that Paul has put forth apply to the Christian community only...the community of koinonia (the fellowship of believers). The world of unbelieving, unconverted men could never live at this level of human relationships and accountability until changed by divine grace (2 Cor. 5:17).

Men ruled by their carnal natures will not tolerate such intrusion. But men who have been washed, forgiven, redeemed, and filled with God's Spirit can see that such "intrusion" is a blessing from God. This level of fellowship serves as protection not intrusion. It is not about control or manipulation but about love and good will toward men. This "intrusion" can keep an individual from forsaking Christ and following the enemy. This is exactly what each of us needs in order to live holy lives and why so few today do.

3. Unfortunately many of today's Christians will not tolerate being accountable to God's family. They are uncomfortable with Paul's boldness toward Philemon. The fact that Paul would be so bold as to tell Philemon what is right and what is wrong, does not sit well with many. In today's climate, often when the truth is spoken in love, the person will simply stop coming to church or go find a new one.

American Christians (and I use the term "Christian" lightly) have

embraced the idea that they are a consumer and the church is a market place and pastors are sales managers. They choose churches based upon how happy and positive the experience is and on how many customer services are offered.

They disregard churches for the same reasons. Churches are no longer chosen based upon God's call upon the Christians' lives. They are no longer chosen based upon what God, through them, wants to do for the church. In fact, the Lord is no longer called upon to lead in these decisions. He has been replaced by emotion and worldly/selfish priorities.

4. Today's Christian sees his/her Christianity as a very private and personal thing. While their experience with Christ is certainly very personal, the Bible knows nothing of a Christianity that is private.

The idea that a group of believers would have any right to hold accountable another believer is beyond their comprehension, knowledge or experience. However, this concept is at the core of New Testament Christianity. Why don't people know this? There are at least two reasons. Pastors are not teaching this for fear of chasing people away and Christians don't read the Book (Bible) for themselves.

The New Testament uses the phrase "one another" some 46 times. Writer after writer tell us to love one another, honor one another, receive one another, build up one another, teach one another, greet one another, serve one another, be patient with one another, be kind to one another, forgive one another, submit to one another, comfort one another, encourage one another, fellowship with one another, have compassion on one another, help one another, care for one another, and pray for one another.

The point is... the Christian life (as God designed it) is not a Lone Ranger thing. It is designed to be lived out in community...a close knit community... a community filled with love and accountability. It is sad that this New Testament concept is so far removed from the experience of many today. Unfortunately many have allowed the world to define "church" for them. This is a serious mistake.

Even sadder is the fact that those who allow this deception to continue will find themselves at a severe disadvantage. They will not have all that God has made available to them for success and victory. They also will not be able to obey much of the New Testament because they won't have other Christians in their lives beyond a surface level.

Perhaps the saddest of all is that some may find it almost impossible to keep their passion for Christ and remain faithful to Him until the end.

May I encourage us to be committed to being New Testament - Biblical Christians! No where are we given permission to re-write the principles upon which God builds His church.

What is your relationship with Christ's church like? Is He pleased?

Pastor Will

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON (A Quick Summary)

I know we "technically" finished Philemon yesterday but as I continued to look at it, I discovered something else that is worth mentioning.

Paul does Philemon a great service by providing him with some wise counsel regarding this difficult time in his life. We have all benefitted from this counsel. However, there is something else we should consider. When we look at the letter as a whole, as way of a summary, we find a 5 step process that we can follow if/when we are tempted to have an unforgiving attitude.

1. **When tempted to have an unforgiving attitude, make yourself accountable to other Christians.** Remember... Paul did this for Philemon when he also addressed the letter to significant other people in his life. This way, those who loved Philemon the most could encourage him and help him do the right thing.

"To Philemon...to Apphia...to Archippus...and to the Church." (1, 2)

2. **When tempted to have an unforgiving attitude, reflect upon the times when God worked through you to help others.** Paul also helped Philemon reflect on such things. Rehearsing past successes can be a real encouragement and motivate you to stay on track.

"I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints...Your love has given me a great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints." (5, 7)

3. **When tempted to have an unforgiving attitude, reflect upon what God could do in the person's life if you were to extend a Christ – like attitude.** Often God allows unpleasant circumstances to come into our lives so that those who are unsaved can see the legitimacy of the Gospel as it oozes out of

us when we are squeezed really hard. Anyone can show Christ when things are going easy. Only the real deal can show Christ when life has turned upside down.

"Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—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 man and as a brother in the Lord." (15, 16)

4. **When tempted to have an unforgiving attitude, reflect upon the times when others have extended grace and mercy to you.** This is always humbling and motivating at the same time. As we talked about a few days ago...we all find ourselves both owed and owing. We all need grace and mercy given to us and we all need to give both away generously to others. Paul is simply reminding Philemon of this principle.

"I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back (whatever Onesimus owes) - not to mention that you owe me your very self." (19)

5. **When tempted to have an unforgiving attitude, consider the example you could set for other Christians who are aware of the situation.** We all have influence. Our decision (right or wrong) will affect others. Philemon's choice would affect Paul and those Christians who knew the circumstances.

"I do wish brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord: refresh my heart in Christ. Epaphras...Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke send you greetings..." (20, 23-24)

Won't these be great spiritual exercises to walk through when we get tempted to have an unforgiving attitude toward someone? I commit myself to following them. This would also be a good format to share with others who we know are being tempted to choose bitterness instead of extending mercy.

Are you struggling with unforgiveness right now? Why not talk with God about each one of these principles? Are some others you know struggling with unforgiveness right now? Why not share this study with them today?

Pastor Will