

THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON
PUT THAT ON MY ACCOUNT
PHILEMON

I. THE SALUTATION OF THE LETTER.

A. The Writer. (*Vs 1a*)

This is the only one of Paul's epistles in which he referred to himself in the salutation as a "*prisoner of Christ*".

7 times as "*an apostle*".

3 times as Christ's "*servant*".

2 times he used nothing.

Paul was actually a prisoner of the Roman Empire, but it was because of his witness for the Saviour.

No doubt, Paul's son in the faith, Timothy, was the one who helped Paul pen this letter from Paul and so he shared in the salutation here. But as we get into the letter itself, it is easy to see that the message is from Paul!

B. The Readers. (*Vs 1b-2*) We see Paul primarily addresses...

1. **Philemon**—About all that is known of *Philemon* in the New Testament is that he was a **convert of the Apostle Paul who is addressed by Paul here as being dearly beloved and fellowlabourer**. He was an integral part of and even a leader in the Church in Colossi.

Philemon is thought to have been wealthy.

- a. He had a Church in his house.
- b. He had slaves.

2. **Apphia**—Most likely the wife of Philemon.

3. **Archippus**—A Believer and minister in the Colossian Church who is addressed in *Colossians 4:17* this way, "*And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*" Archippus may have been a son or other relative of **Philemon** and **Apphia**.

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4. **Church**—Which met in *Philemon's* house.

C. The Greeting. (*Vs 3*)

This is Paul's usual greeting. The word order is important. The word "*peace*" expresses a *spiritual state that denotes a proper relationship between God and man*.

Peace is the effect of only one cause: The "*grace*" of God! There can be no "*peace*" apart from "*grace*"!

"Peace with God comes by means of *faith*!

Romans 5:1—"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The "*peace of God*", which is an experiential condition, comes from the **indwelling and infilling** ministries of the Holy Spirit in one's life.

D. The Commendation. (*Vs 4-7*)

1. The Thanksgiving. (*Vs 4-5*)

Paul gives thanks for three things here:

- a. For **Philemon's Love To The Lord Jesus!**
- b. For **Philemon's Faith In The Lord Jesus!**
- c. For **Philemon's Love Of The Saints!**

2. The Prayer. (*Vs 6*)

As Philemon would gain a fuller understanding of his blessings in Christ, he would become more effective in sharing Christ!

The more a Believer comes to comprehend all he has in Christ, the more eager he is to share Christ with others!

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3. **The Testimony. (Vs 7)**
Philemon's love resulted in joy and encouragement for Paul, because Philemon had been a source of refreshment to the saints.

II. THE BODY OF THE LETTER.

A. **The Plea. (Vs 8-12, 16, 17)**

Paul at this point gave his recommendations to *Philemon* regarding the runaway slave *Onesimus*.

Throughout this plea, the Apostle's words were **courteous**, yet they bore a note of **authority and earnestness**.

He revealed an important double truth here:

1. **Onesimus was now a son in the faith to Paul. (Vs 10)**
2. **Onesimus was now a Brother in Christ to Philemon. (Vs 16)**

As a person in the Roman Empire, *Onesimus* was in the lowest social status in the Roman world—a slave, with no rights.

Nevertheless, he was now, as a Believer, on a spiritual plane equal with his owner, Philemon, and with the Apostle Paul!

1 Corinthians 12:13 "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

Galatians 3:28—"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

1. **We See This Plea Here, Not A Command! (Vs 8)**
"Wherefore" is a key word in Paul's plea.

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Philemon's love that he had demonstrated to all the saints, should now include Onesimus!

Paul acknowledged here that he could have ordered *Philemon* as to what to do with *Onesimus*. (Based on his office as an Apostle, but he didn't do that.)

2. **We See This Plea For Love's Sake! (Vs 9)**
Paul's appeal was on the basis of love!

Philemon's love for Paul and love for Onesimus!

a. Paul refers to his age.

b. Paul refers to his imprisonment again.

3. **We See This Plea For A Spiritual Son! (Vs 10-11)**

Only Timothy, Titus, and *Onesimus* are referred to as Paul's sons. A special bond of affection normally exists between a Believer and the person God used to bring him to Christ!

"Onesimus" was a common name for slaves and means **"useful."**

But by running away from *Philemon*, this slave had become the opposite of his name—he was **"useless"** to *Philemon!*

The words **"but now"** suggest a change resulting from his **new birth**. After his salvation, *Onesimus* became:

- a. **Profitable To Philemon.**
- b. **Profitable To Paul.**

4. **We See This Plea Was From The Heart! (Vs 12)**
This verse suggests that *Onesimus* was the bearer of this epistle from Paul to *Philemon!*

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Philemon would not have opportunity to think over Paul's request before seeing *Onesimus*.

5. **We See This Plea Was From A Partner! (Vs 17)**
If *Philemon* rejected *Onesimus*, it would be like rejecting the Apostle Paul, his friend, fellow worker, brother, and even partner in the Gospel ministry!

B. **The Relationship. (Vs 13-16)**

1. **We See The Present Brotherhood Between Paul And *Onesimus*. (Vs 13)**
If *Onesimus* were kept by Paul, which Paul would have liked, *Onesimus* would have served in place of *Philemon*.

As we saw in the last chapter of Paul's epistle to Timothy, we know Paul could have used some assistance!

Knowing that a slave was his master's property, Paul had no choice but to send *Onesimus* back to *Philemon*.

2. **We See The Past Brotherhood Between Paul And *Philemon*. (Vs 14)**
Retaining a slave could only be done by obtaining the owner's consent.

Though Paul probably could have talked *Philemon* into letting him keep *Onesimus* in Rome, he did not want to take undue advantage of their relationship.

Paul preferred that such permission would be voluntary.
3. **We See The Future Brotherhood Between *Onesimus* And *Philemon*. (Vs 15-16)**

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Philemon's temporary loss of his slave resulted in his having him returned permanently.

Paul also contrasted *Onesimus's* former status as a slave with his new relationship to *Philemon* as a brother.

The Plea...The Relationship...

C. **The Pledge.**

1. ***Philemon* Was To Charge *Onesimus's* Debt To Paul. (Vs 18-19a)**
a. ***Onesimus* was in debt to *Philemon* For A Debt That He Could Not Pay.**
(A picture of the sinner.)

b. **Paul was not involved in any way with *Onesimus*.** *(A picture of the Saviour.)*

c. **Paul assumed *Onesimus's* debt.**
(A picture of the atonement by our Substitute.)

d. **Paul wrote it in his own hand.**
(A picture of security!)
2. ***Philemon* Was To Consider His Own Debt To Paul. (Vs 19b)**
3. ***Philemon* Was To Refresh Paul. (Vs 20)**
Receiving and restoring *Onesimus* would give some benefit to Paul in the LORD.

Philemon had "**refreshed the bowels**" of all the saints!
(Vs 7)

What does that even mean? Think of it as satisfying a deep need or desire someone has within them! You can't get much deeper than the bowels, right!?

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How could he refuse the Apostle Paul?

- 4. Paul Believed That *Philemon* Would Go Even Beyond What Paul Asked. (Vs 21)**

III. THE CONCLUSION. (Vs 22-25)

- A. It Is Believed That This Was Written During Paul's First Imprisonment In Rome From Which Paul Would Be Released. (Vs 22)**

- 1. Paul Asked For *Philemon* To Prepare Lodging For Him!**
- 2. Paul Asked For *Philemon* To Pray For His Release!**

- B. We See Paul Send Greetings From Others In Rome. (Vs 23-24)**

1. Epaphras, a Colossian who was a fellow prisoner.
2. Marcus (possibly John Mark?)
3. Aristarcus (from Macedonia mentioned in Acts?)
4. Demas (when Demas was faithfully serving with Paul)
5. Lucas (author of Luke and Acts who traveled with Paul)

- C. We See Paul's Closing Benediction Of Grace. (Vs 25)**

Conclusion

What a wonderful heartfelt letter from the Apostle Paul to his dearly beloved friend and fellowlabourer, *Philemon*!

What wonderful truths are presented here regarding what Christ has done for us and what we should do for others! (An example of Christian courtesy!)

I don't know how the LORD has spoken to your heart tonight, but if he has pointed out something in your own heart that needs to be dealt with, please be obedient to Him in the invitation tonight!