

Philemon

Philemon
Tape #8205
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Let's turn now in our Bibles to the Book of Philemon. Be careful, you'll go right past it.

Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, Notice, he doesn't say, "Paul, a prisoner of the Roman Government. He is a prisoner of Jesus Christ! It is his love for Jesus that has placed him in bond, his witness and testimony for Jesus. So he doesn't consider himself a prisoner of Rome or the Roman government, but he is a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

It makes a big difference in how you look at it. You know, if you think, well, I'm a prisoner of the Roman government, then you can sit there and sulk in your cell. But if you are a prisoner of Jesus Christ, what can you do, but rejoice? I'm a prisoner of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm bound by Him!

and Timothy our brother, So Paul includes Timothy, his young son in the faith, who at this moment was in Rome with Paul. Paul is writing from his prison in Rome. Timothy will later go to Ephesus and Paul will write his letter to Timothy in Ephesus. But at this time he is still there in Rome.

unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, Now Philemon was a wealthy man, who lived in Colosse, which is near Ephesus. And he was saved through Paul's ministry, and was a part of this vital, important church in Colosse.

Unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, ²*And to our beloved Apphia*, We don't know who she is but it is thought that she is probably the wife of Philemon, Apphia, the wife of Philemon.

and Archippus Who is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians (Colossian 4:17). Paul says, I say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry that you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it. So Paul's letter to the church in Colosse, this Archippus is mentioned and Paul in encouraging him to fulfill the ministry that he has in the Lord.

Archippus, our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: Now throughout the New Testament, there are several references to the church in your house.

It is interesting concerning this couple, Aquila and Priscilla. They were with Paul, when Paul first went to Corinth. They later moved to Ephesus. When they were in Ephesus, and Paul wrote his letter to the church in Ephesus, he greeted those who were in the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. Later Priscilla and Aquila went to Rome. And when Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome, he also greets the church that is in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. So this couple, wherever they went, they opened up their house and opened it up for a church. For the first two centuries, the church did not have buildings, but they met in houses.

And thus, there are many references in the New Testament to the churches that were in the houses of various believers. Of course we have today, many home fellowships. Couples, like Priscilla and Aquila, who have opened up their home and have invited others to come in for the study of the Word. And they form actually, little churches, so to speak, the body of Christ, meeting in various homes. So, the church in thy house, Archippus.

³*Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is so typical of Paul's letters. Grace and peace. It is never reversed. Paul never says, peace and grace, be unto you.

Grace and peace is the proper order. You will never have real peace in your heart, the peace of God in your heart, until you really discover the grace of God. It is through the discovery of the grace of God that you then experience the peace of God. Because when you discover the grace of God, it takes the burden off of you, and it puts it onto God.

Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling. You see, it's on Him, His grace. It's not on, now

unto me, who is struggling to keep to from falling. Because as long as it's on me, it's a struggle and it's never a peace. There is never any place to just kick back and say, ooh, bless the Lord! This is glorious! And to know the peace of God, it's not until you have really experienced and know the grace of God, that you then experience and know the peace of God.

Paul is desiring these beautiful characteristics. The grace is the common greeting for the Greeks, *charis*, grace, when they would greet people. That was the greeting.

To the Jews, the common greeting was "*Shalom*". And even to the present day, the Jews greet you with a *Shalom*. So he takes the Greek, *charis*, combines it with the Hebrew, *Shalom*, and uses that to open each of his epistles. It's grace to you from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴*I thank my God* (Paul said.), *making mention of thee always in my prayers*, Paul, no doubt, had a tremendous prayer life. He did say pray without ceasing. And in so many of his letters, he mentions his prayers for them. Cease not to pray for you, night and day. That, and then he tells them what he is praying for them. No wonder God used Paul in such a remarkable way because he was a man of prayer. If you want God to use your life, it's important that you become a person of prayer, waiting on God. And oh, how God will use you, through prayer.

So I make mention of you always in my prayers.

⁵*Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints*; Now, Paul knew Philemon. Paul led Philemon to a faith in Jesus Christ. But, it's always good to hear of those that God has used you as an instrument, in their salvation, it's always an encouragement and a blessing to hear that they are going on in the Lord, to hear of their faith and their love, that they have. It is always an encouragement.

And so with Philemon, who is faithful, going on. And his love for the Lord is something that is noteworthy. People talk about, oh how Philemon loved the Lord, and his love for the brothers and sisters in the body of Christ! He was a man that was marked by love.

Hearing of your love and faith, which you have 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*. What Paul is saying, is that he wants him to know of all of the wonderful things that we have in and through Christ Jesus.

When Paul was writing to the church in Ephesus, he began the epistle by saying, thanks be unto God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all Spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus in heavenly places. And then he spends the first three chapters of Ephesians, telling them of all of the things that they had in Christ.

As he prays for the church of Ephesus, he prays that they might have the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, that they might know the hope of their calling, that they might know those things that God has provided for you. He has made available to you because you are walking in Christ Jesus.

I think that one of the sad tragedies of the Christian experience is that so many times, we live beneath what God has provided. We don't appropriate all that God has made available.

Peter wrote (2 Peter 1:3), God has given to us, all that is necessary for a life of Godliness. He has not left anything out! The problem is that we don't always know what is available and or we don't appropriate, what is available for us. And many times the failure to appropriate is because we don't know. And so basically, he is praying for Philemon, that he might know all of the riches that are available to him in Christ Jesus. The communication of thy faith may be effectual by the acknowledging of all of these good things, which is in you through Christ Jesus, that you might know all of these blessings.

⁷*For we have great joy and consolation in thy love*, To hear of your love, it brings tremendous joy and comfort to our hearts!

because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. Now, in the days of Paul, Biblical days, they had the feeling and the belief that the deepest feelings and emotions were felt in the stomach, not in the heart. And so they used the word, bowels, which of course has changed in its meaning and understanding as far as we are today.

So most of the modern translations have no longer translated the word, bowels, as bowels. But they have translated it as heart, because when we talk about, he's my sweetheart or she's my sweetheart, or we talk about, my heart yearns for you. And we think of the heart as the seat of our emotions. And thus we use the word, heart, today. Thus most of the modern translations no longer translate it as bowels, but have modernized it to my heart.

So we will use the modern translation because of the change of the usage of the word in our modern English. So I have great joy and consolation in your love because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. You are a blessing, Philemon, to the saints of God. They've been blessed because of your love.

⁸*Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,* Wherefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to order you to that which is fitting. Paul was an apostle. He could speak with apostolic authority. And though I might be very bold in enjoining you to do that which is fitting or right.

⁹*Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged,* I can begin to identify with that.

and now also (he said) a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to the disciples, the Gentiles or the heathen, love to exercise authority. But it shall not be so among you. Whoever would be the chief among you, let him become the servant of all.

We see today people today who love authority. And they love to exercise authority. And we are always running into problems with people who, because they've been given a little authority, become totally obnoxious. And the classic demonstration is to go down to city hall and try and get a building permit! People, well Jesus said, that heathen love to exercise authority. But it shall not be so among you.

Now, tragically, it is so, even in many churches, where the leadership loves to exercise authority, ruler ship. There was and thank God, it passed, but it will come around again as all things do. There was, for a time, a shepherding movement, where people loved to have authority over others. I am your shepherd and thus responsible for you. And thus you are not to make any decisions, without first of all, counseling with me. And so people couldn't buy a new car. They couldn't buy a home. They couldn't go out with someone, until they first of all talked to their shepherd. It was sort of a, mother may I? You know. And they tried to take full control over a person's life. May I go to the bathroom, please? I mean it was tragic. And in the church, where they sought to exercise authority. And Jesus said, it shall not be so.

Now here is Paul. Though I might be bold and enjoin you. I could order you. Yet Paul said, for love's sake, I would rather just beseech you, ask you. Being such a one as Paul, the aged and now also a prisoner for Jesus Christ. Again, not a prisoner of Rome, but a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰*I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:* Now, Onesimus was also mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians. In chapter four, in verse nine, he says, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.

So writing to the Colossians, and the letter was delivered about the same time, it is thought that Tychicus, who delivered the letter of Paul's to Colosse, accompanied Onesimus back. And Onesimus was carrying this letter to Philemon.

But Onesimus, Paul said to the Colossians, he is one of you, but he is a faithful brother. And he is one of you. So he, originally, is from Colosse. And we know that Philemon was a part of the church there in Colosse. And we know it from some of the others that Paul will be speaking about soon.

So I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds. Even as Paul spoke of Timothy as his son in the faith, he spoke of Titus as his son in the faith. So now also, Onesimus, a son in the faith. Those that Paul brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. He was a father to these young men. A spiritual father that they could look up to, that they could come to, receive love and advice, and counsel, Godly counsel, from the spiritual father. So he was brought into faith through Paul's ministry. And Paul is now interceding for him with Philemon.

Paul declaring, concerning Onesimus, ¹¹*Which in time past was to thee unprofitable,* The name,

Onesimus, in Greek, means profitable.

Now I know Paul said in times past, he was to you, unprofitable *but now profitable to thee and to me*: There has been a change, a radical change, in this young man's life. He is now a child of God! He's now born again by the Spirit of God. He's now a beloved brother in Jesus Christ.

Paul said, ¹²*Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels*: Whom I have sent again. And I want you to receive him, that is mine own heart. Receive him as my own heart.

¹³*Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead (place) he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel*: I would like to have kept him. I would like to have kept him so that he could, for your sake, minister to me in the bonds of the gospel. Paul, of course was restricted, there in the Roman prison. No doubt, Onesimus carried messages for Paul, brought food to Paul, took care of Paul's needs. He was just there to help Paul. Thus, Paul said, I'd like to have retained him with me, that in your stead, he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel.

¹⁴*But without thy mind (But without your permission, or without your mind.) would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly*. I didn't want to force things. I wanted you to be willing.

Now, this is good for Philemon's sake. If I do things because I am forced to do them, there is very little reward for it. But if I do things from a willing heart, then there is a reward for that!

So Paul is desiring that Onesimus be there to minister to him, but he wants it be from a willing heart of Philemon. He doesn't want to push the issue. I see here the graciousness of this great servant of Jesus Christ, Paul. What a gracious man he is. He does have apostolic authority. He does have power. He could order things around, but he doesn't do that. He wants to give them an opportunity from their own heart to volunteer their service to the Lord. And our service to the Lord should always come from a willing heart, from a heart that just wants to do it. It should never be forced, but from a willing heart.

Paul said, ¹⁵*For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever*; This is a very interesting rationale. He departed for a time. We don't know. In the purposes of God, it may be that that departing for a time, was that you might receive him forever as brother, an eternal brother in Christ. Many times, God uses adverse circumstances to work out eternal purposes in our lives.

What may seem to us to be a tragedy, is many times, God at work. He is working out His plan. This is where the difficulty always rises, because as God works in my life, He always has eternity in view, my eternal benefit and welfare. And I look at life. I'm always looking for the temporal advantages. How I feel about it today. How it affects me now. And because God is always looking at the eternal and I'm usually looking at the temporal, we find ourselves doing things that are at odds with the work that God is doing in our lives. Because I can't always see the eternal plan of God as He is working it out day by day, the process, the daily processes. I can't see the full story. I only see that portion of the story that I'm living in right now. And that this chapter happens to be a bad chapter! But things will change as the story goes on. And the beautiful thing, we know the end of the story. And we all lived happily, ever after!

But right now, it's not so good. Right now, there are difficulties. But God is working, even in these. Because all things are working together for good, to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. We've got to believe that. And that Scripture will sustain us in the dark times of our life, where we don't understand, we fall back on what we do understand. And we understand that all things are working together for good, to those who love God.

So how do you know, Philemon? You lost him for a little time, but maybe it was God's purpose that it should happen, that you might gain him as an eternal brother. It's very possible had Onesimus just remained a slave in the house of Philemon, he would never have come to Jesus Christ. But it was his running away to Rome, where he meets Paul in prison. Whom I have begotten in my bonds, in prison. And the purposes of God, in bringing Onesimus to salvation, were accomplished by his fleeing to Rome. So perhaps, this could be what God had purposed for his eternal welfare.

Now, he said, I want you to receive him. ¹⁶*Not now as a servant (or a slave), but above a servant*, I don't want you to take him back as a slave. I want you to receive him, above a slave, *a brother beloved*, Receive

him as a beloved brother in Jesus, as an equal.

You know, the beautiful thing about Jesus Christ is that it gives us all equality. No one is above another. We all stand on the same level when we stand before our Lord! Where there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond or free, rich or poor, we all stand on the same level before the Lord. I want you to accept him as a brother. Not as a slave, but as a brother, a beloved brother.

specially to me, but how much more unto thee (you), both in the flesh, and in the Lord? Could be really profitable. He was unprofitable, but he is going to be profitable, now to you, in the things of the Lord.

¹⁷*If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.* This is beautiful intercession on Paul's part. What a glorious picture it is of how Jesus intercedes for us. We are accepted, the Bible says (Ephesians 1:6), in the Beloved. God receives us as He receives His own Son, as you are in Christ Jesus, you are accepted in the Beloved. So if you count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

¹⁸*If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;* If he has wronged you or owes you anything, put it on my account! Charge it to me! Paul declares that he would repay.

And so with us, Jesus, our Advocate before the Father, Jesus the Mediator between God and man, Jesus, the intercessor, interceding for us, took upon Himself the sins of the world. God laid on Him the iniquities of us all! And now as we come to God through Jesus Christ, our sins are pardoned.

Now, Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. In the Book of Revelation, in the great Tribulation period, he is going to be cast out of heaven. As he is cast out, the angels say, woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, for the accuser of the brethren is cast forth (Revelation 12:10). Who accuses them before the Father, day and night. Satan is no friend of yours. He is accusing you before God, day or night.

Unfortunately, we give to him a lot of opportunities for accusation. And when he begins to accuse us before God, Jesus, our Intercessor, says, Father, put that on my account! Charge that to Me! Because He died for our sins! And so the beautiful intercessory work of Jesus Christ, bearing our sin!

As David cried (Psalm 32:1-2), oh, how happy is the man whose transgressions are forgiven. Oh, how happy is the man, whose sins are covered. Oh, how happy is the man, to whom God does not impute iniquity. It's all put on the account of Jesus, who bore our sins!

So if he has wronged you, if he owes you anything, charge it to me. Put it on my account!

¹⁹*I Paul have written it with mine own hand,* For I, Paul have written it with my own hand. I've signed a VISA card. Let him charge what he wants, I'll pay it.

I will repay it: I give you my word. I've signed my name. I will repay it!

But then Paul goes on to say, *albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.* Don't bring that up!

²⁰*Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.* Refresh my heart in the Lord! Oh, let me have the joy of hearing, you know, of your total forgiveness and all of this young man. Let my heart be refreshed.

²¹*Having confidence in thy obedience* This is known as a presumptive close.

Having, therefore, confidence in your obedience, *I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.* That's a real presumptive close. Now I know you will. I'm sure you will, knowing you! Knowing the grace and the love that you have, I know that you will do it.

But then now Paul goes on to some personal issues. ²²*But withal prepare me also a lodging:* I want you to prepare a room for me.

for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. I think I'm going to be released. So, fix me a room. I hope to be visiting you soon.

There are oftentimes comes the question, concerning the value of prayer considering the sovereignty of God. When you look at the sovereignty of God as a doctrinal issue, you know He is going to do what He wants to do. Then it brings up the question, then why do we pray, if God is going to do what He wants to do anyhow? Then why do we pray? And you can get all confused if you try to follow that line of reasoning. We pray because the Scripture commands us to pray. And I believe that things are wrought through prayer, that would not otherwise, be wrought. I believe that God answers prayer! And we are encouraged and

commanded in the Scriptures to pray.

Prayer is more than just asking God for things however. Prayer is spending time in communion with God, sharing with God, your heart, your feelings, expressing your love, worshipping, adoration. They are all part of prayer. Unfortunately we have narrowed it down. And we only think of prayer as personal petitions. And we only think to pray when we are in deep trouble. But when the Bible says, pray without ceasing. It means that we should have a heart that has an attitude of prayer continually. Thinking of God. Worshipping God. Talking with God. Bearing our souls before Him. Not always in the manner of petition, many times, in the realm of blessing and praising and thanksgiving.

And so I trust that through your prayers, I'll be able to come.

And then Paul's greetings, first of all to Epaphras. Now Epaphras is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians. He said to them, as you also learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ. So he was one of the ministers in the church of Colosse. And Paul mentions Epaphras as being with him there in Rome (Colossians 4:12). He said, Epaphras, who is one of you. That is, and he said of Onesimus, that he is one of you. That he was from Colosse. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you might stand perfect and complete in all in the will of God. So here was Epaphras, a minister of the church. He is with Paul, but oh, his heart is still there with the people as he fervently prays for them. And so Epaphras is joining with Paul in the greeting to Philemon.

²³*There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;* It could be that Epaphras was also in bonds, in prison, with Paul, there in Rome.

²⁴*Marcus*, Marcus was John Mark. He was the nephew of Barnabas. He joined with Paul on the first missionary journey. He wrote the gospel according to Mark. He is now with Paul in Rome, as Paul is there in prison, a companion with Paul.

Aristarchus, Aristarchus was from Thessalonica, a Macedonian. There in Ephesus when the silversmith, Demetrius created this riot and got the people all stirred up, and the people gathered in the great amphitheater there, they grabbed Aristarchus, because they knew that he was one of Paul's companions. They brought him in to the arena. He tried to get their attention, but they started chanting, great is Diana of the Ephesians. And he wasn't able to talk to them.

But Aristarchus, he was with Paul in some of Paul's missionary journeys. In Acts chapter twenty, when Paul then left Ephesus, Aristarchus accompanied him along with Secundus and Gaius of Derbe and Timothy and Tychicus and Trophimus.

In Acts twenty-seven, we read that he accompanied Paul on the ship, to take Paul to Rome. So he was in that great storm with Paul, as Paul was being taken as a prisoner to Rome, in Acts twenty-seven.

Then in Colossians four (Colossians 4:10), Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, salutes you and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas. That's how we know that's he a nephew of Barnabas. Touching whom ye received commandments, if he comes unto you, receive him.

So Marcus, Aristarchus, *Demas*, Originally, Paul talks about him as a fellow laborer. Here he just says, Demas. Later on when Paul will write his second letter to Timothy, he says, Demas has forsaken me, having loved the present world more than the things of God. So here is Demas on his way out. I mean, he first of all is a fellow servant, in the earlier epistle, now he is just listed as there, not doing much. But the next time we hear of him, he is deserted.

Lucas, my fellowlabourers. Luke, the author of the gospel according to Luke, and the author of the Book of Acts. So here are Mark and Luke, both of them authors of the gospels. They are with Paul there in Rome as Paul is a prisoner of Jesus Christ in the prison in Rome.

And he closes, ²⁵*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.* So Paul's beautiful letter of intercession, concerning Onesimus, the runaway slave, asking Philemon not only to forgive, but not to receive him back again as a slave, but to receive him as a brother in the Lord. Paul promising to pay the debt that he might owe and then speaking with assurance, knowing of the love that Philemon had, knowing that he will receive Onesimus without trying to punish him.

A runaway slave was often times punished with death, when he was found. The slaves outnumbered the

common people. There were sixty million slaves at this time in the Roman Empire. And thus they had to keep them under tight subjection, lest they rise up. And thus there were severe penalties for running away. With Onesimus, it was compounded by the fact that he stole money from Philemon, to run away. When a runaway slave was caught, he was severely punished, and as I said, oftentimes, put to death, but one of the punishments for a runaway slave was taking a hot branding iron and brand the letter, "F", on their forehead, which stood for "fugitivus", a fugitive. And from that time on, the slave had the scar in his forehead, so that everyone knew that he was a runaway slave at one time. He was marked.

Paul is saying, I want you to receive him as you would receive me. I don't want you to receive him as a slave any longer, but as a beloved brother in the Lord. Whatever he owes you, put it on my account, I will pay it.

A beautiful letter, a beautiful intercession, but oh, it speaks to us so much of God's love and the work of Jesus Christ for us, in the intercessory work on our behalf!

Father, we thank You for the opportunity of studying this personal letter of Paul's to Philemon, for all of the little personal touches. And the insight that it gives to us in the heart of this great apostle. Lord, help us, that even as Paul said, be ye followers of me as I also am of Jesus Christ that we might follow the example that Paul has set, the beautiful example of love and grace. And Lord, may we be loving. May we be graceful and gracious. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.