

PHILEMON

Author :

Paul an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Date :

Sometime about 60 AD.

Theme :

Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison, being persecuted for preaching the gospel. Onesimus, a slave belonging to Philemon, had run away from his master and come to the place where Paul was. He heard the gospel through Paul and believed in Christ. Now Paul is sending him back to Philemon. The name Onesimus means "profitable." Though he may have been useless to Philemon in time past, now being changed by God's grace he was useful to Philemon, to Paul, and above all, to Christ Himself. This is one thing the gospel of Christ accomplishes in those who believe it: It makes useless people useful. An important theme in this little letter is the love that believers should show toward God's children no matter how low their station in life may be.

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1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ and Timothy *our* brother,

To Philemon our dear *brother*, and fellow worker, 2 and to *our* dear Apphia and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

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

4 I thank my God, always mentioning you in my prayers, 5 for I hear of your love and faith which you have for the Lord Jesus and for all saints, 6 that the sharing of your faith may become effective by knowing every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus. 7 For we have great joy and encouragement in your love because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by you, brother.

8 Therefore, though I could be very bold in Christ to order you *to do* what is fitting, 9 yet instead, for love's sake, I appeal *to you* as Paul an old *man* and now also a prisoner of Jesus

Christ. 10 I appeal to you on behalf of my son Onesimus; in my chains I have become his father. 11 In time past he was not profitable to you, but now *is* profitable to you and to me.

12 I have sent him back *to you*. Therefore receive him, that is, my own heart. 13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that in your place he could be of service to me in the bonds of the gospel, 14 but without *knowing* your mind I would do nothing, so that your good deed would not be like something forced, but voluntary. 15 For perhaps he left you for a time that you might receive him for ever, 16 not now as a slave, but more than a slave, a dear brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the body and in the Lord?

17 So if you count me a partner, receive him as myself. 18 If he has wronged you, or owes *you* anything, put that to my account. 19 I Paul have

1 "Prisoner" - Eph 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim 1:8.

"Timothy" - Phil 1:1; Acts 16:1-3.

"Philemon" - this is the only place in the Bible he appears.

2 "Apphia" - we are not told who she was.

"Archippus" - Col 4:17.

"Soldier" - 2 Tim 2:2; 4:7.

"House" - Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15.

3 Rom 1:7.

4,5 Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4; Eph 1:15,16; Phil 1:3; Col 1:3,4; 1 Thess 1:2; 2 Tim 1:3.

6 "By knowing" - knowing what we have in Christ and sharing our faith effectively are intimately connected. The more we know what we have in Him, the better we can speak to others and treat them with kindness.

"In Christ" - Rom 6:3-8; Eph 1:1,4.

7 "Refreshed" - v 20; Rom 15:32; 1 Cor 16:18; 2 Cor 7:13; 2 Tim 1:16. This is what loving fellowship, generosity, and kindness do.

"Saints" - Rom 1:7.

8,9 As a servant of Christ Paul could have set before Philemon his duty as a believer, and the commands of Scripture. But Philemon had already shown that he had love in his heart (v 7), and so Paul appeals to him on that basis.

"Old man" - Paul was then probably about 60 years of age. Compare Acts 7:58.

10 "Son" - he means spiritual son, not literal. Compare 1 Tim 1:2. Through Paul's teaching Onesimus received new birth in Christ (John 1:12,13). Being in prison did not stop Paul from witnessing for Christ.

11 The name Onesimus means "useful." He was a slave of Philemon (v 16) who had run away and become useless to him. But having become a child of God he became useful in a far higher sense.

12 "My own heart" - such was the love the great apostle had for one from what men regarded as the lowest class of society. This is what Christ's love can do in anyone who

will receive it.

13,14 Paul was sure that Philemon would have gladly been a help to him if he had been where Paul was. But he would not try to use another man's servant without consent. If a favor is forced and not free, it is no favor at all. This is true also of any gift we make to God or to His people - 2 Cor 9:7.

15,16 "Slave" - notes at Eph 6:5; Ex 21:2.

"A dear brother" - Col 4:9. In Christ masters and slaves, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, those whom men regard as high caste or as low caste or as outcaste, are all brothers and one people and one body - Col 3:11; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 12:12,13. Any Christian who does not accept this is rejecting a very important truth revealed by God Himself. Exalting ourselves over those considered lower is very offensive to God.

17-19 Paul had learned this from Christ. He knew that God accepts believers as He does His own Son - Acts 15:8; Rom 5:2; 14:3; Eph 2:18. He knew that we must accept one another as Christ accepts us - Rom 15:7. He knew that accepting someone a person sends is the same as accepting the person who sent him - John 13:20. He knew that all the wrongs, sins, and spiritual debts of believers have been put to Christ's account and that Christ paid them in full - Isa 53:5,6; Rom 8:33,34; 2 Cor 5:19-21. Paul had learned what love is and what these divine principles mean, and was happy to put them into practice. So must we be. We should be happy to pay the debts of other believers as Christ has paid our debts, and to accept other believers who have offended us as God has accepted us who have offended Him.

"Your very self" - Paul probably means that Philemon had come to Christ and gained salvation through Paul's ministry. Philemon had gained this great thing through Paul. So he should be willing to

written *this* with my own hand, I will pay it back; but I do not need to tell you that you owe me even your very self. 20 Yes, brother, let me rejoice in the Lord because of you. Refresh my heart in the Lord. 21 I have confidence in your obedience and so write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

22 Moreover, prepare a place for me to stay,

overlook the offenses of another brother in Christ whom Paul loved.

20 This benefit was not for himself but for one who was dear to him.

"Refresh" - v 7.

21 "Obedience" - not obedience to a command, for Paul gave none (vs 8,9), but obedience to the high principles of love. This is the best of all kinds of obedience. We should do things to please Christ

for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 *as do* Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit.

Amen.

simply because we love Him, and to help others on the same basis.

22 Because of the prayers of Philemon (and others) Paul expected to be released from prison. Compare Acts 12:5-11.

23 "Epaphras" - Col 1:7; 4:12.

24 "Marcus" - Mark - 2 Tim 4:11.

"Aristarchus" - Col 4:10.

"Demas, Luke" - Col 4:14.

25 Rom 1:7; 16:20.