

**A PERSONAL
VERSE BY VERSE COMMENTARY**

PHILEMON

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Philem. 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon *our* dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,

Immediately we are told that this letter is from Paul and Timothy to Philemon. Paul is in prison at the time of its writing. He introduces himself as “a prisoner of Jesus Christ” – in other words, he is in prison because of his ministry in sharing the gospel. Paul refers to Timothy as our brother, which identifies Philemon as a believer. Not only are they connected positionally “in the Lord,” they are also dear friends and fellow laborers. This indicates a more intimate relationship strengthened all the more by working for a common purpose.

Philem. 1:2 And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus *our* fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:

Although he is addressing Philemon specifically, he is also addressing Apphia (a beloved sister, indicating a heart bond), Archippus (a fellow soldier, indicates a man willing to put his life on the line for what he believes), and to the church (the body of believers) that meet in Philemon’s home. I think there is much to be said for the concentrated focus and efforts of a limited number of people who are centered in Jesus. A small group of people in a community who together serve in love and obedience to the Word can truly make a larger impact on their community than the larger church can on the larger community it serves. Thus, the importance of the small group concept in the large church. I don’t think many of these small groups today are really functioning effectively in their communities as much as they are serving to bond and edify the community of believers. One shouldn’t be sacrificed for the other. The service/ministry outreach should result from the spiritual growth of the members of a given group.

Philem. 1:3 Grace to you, and peace, from God *our* Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, Paul expresses his wish that they are enjoying grace and peace, blessings that are only possible as a gift from “God *our* Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is a form of address that Paul uses frequently. As we have heard often, you can’t experience peace without first receiving God’s grace. I just thought about relating the order of presentation—grace with the Father and peace through the Son. Grace is a gift that is undeserved given from love—the act of a Father. Peace is only available to us because of the obedience/sacrifice of the Son. Our sin deserves judgment—which Christ took upon Himself in our place. Because of that we can have a peace relationship with the Father.

Philem. 1:4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,

These people are dear to Paul’s heart because he always mentions them in his prayers. It’s mainly the members of my immediate family that always get mentioned in my prayers. They are the ones dearest to my heart.

Philem. 1:5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

Paul is a servant and a teacher. What is more inspiring to a teacher than to have students who are interested and willing to learn and then act accordingly.

Apparently, this group of believers was known for their love and faith—toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints (other believers).

Philem. 1:6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Paul prays for the communication of their faith (how it is expressed to others) to become effectual (result in an impact on others; in what they believe and how they live their lives) because they acknowledge that every good thing about them (or in them) is a result of Christ Jesus (the fact that they have the Spirit working through them because of Jesus' sacrifice). Any positive results from the sharing of their faith are in spite of them, not because of them—it is strictly a work of Jesus thru the ministry of the Spirit.

Philem. 1:7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

“we” – Paul and Timothy

“have great joy and consolation” – Joy is an attitude of the spirit and consolation speaks of comfort which would imply “in spite of the circumstances.” (Paul was in prison.) What is the source of this joy and consolation? Their love. How was this love manifested? By providing refreshment (encouragement, comfort, understanding, etc.) to the bowels/hearts of the saints (fellow believers). As a mom, this is a very relatable truth. Anyone who ministers to or encourages your child in any way—encourages you. These fellow believers were Paul's children in the faith—and any ministry to them ministered to Paul as well.

Philem. 1:8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

Philem. 1:9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Paul starts off with a statement that what he is about to ask of Philemon could boldly be asked for outright as the right thing to do before the Lord. But instead, he is going to beseech (beg) him on the basis of love for an old man who is currently in prison because of his stand for Jesus.

Philem. 1:10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

He is pleading on behalf of Onesimus, a new child in the faith, a new believer won to Christ by Paul even while in prison. (No mention is made of how they met.)

Philem. 1:11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

This alludes to Onesimus' position in relationship to Philemon, which is given full enlightenment in verse 16—he was a servant, a slave. Evidently, he wasn't a very good servant since Paul referred to him as having been “unprofitable.” But now, because of his relationship with the Lord, would be profitable (of great use/value) to both Paul and Philemon.

Philem. 1:12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

Paul has sent Onesimus back to Philemon (evidently carrying this letter). He is sending him back with a piece of his own heart. (Onesimus had become very special/beloved by Paul.)

Philem. 1:13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

He would rather have kept Onesimus since he could have been very useful to Paul while he was in prison. He points out that the ministry of Onesimus would have been credited to Philemon.

Philem. 1:14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

Paul is pointing out to Philemon that he would never keep Onesimus without Philemon freely offering his services from the depths of his love and commitment to Paul and his ministry before the Lord. (If Paul had just kept Onesimus, he would have deprived Philemon of another opportunity to store up treasure in heaven.)

Philem. 1:15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

Philem. 1:16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

Paul continues to point out the positives. He is saying that the fact of his running away had resulted in great gain for Philemon. He now owned a servant who would be of more benefit to him as a servant and even better—he now had a new brother in the faith. This was a new permanent relationship. He wouldn't have to worry that Onesimus would run away again. Again, Paul emphasized that Onesimus was his beloved brother. (Any boss or teacher will tell you that a willing, devoted employee or student will be much more productive than a person who is just there out of duty or responsibility or parental directive or....)

Philem. 1:17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

Paul makes the appeal as personal as he can—If Philemon considers Paul a partner (a co-laborer in love for the cause of Christ), he asks that Onesimus be received as Paul himself would be received. (That's exactly how Jesus presents us to the Father.)

Philem. 1:18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;

Paul gives another proof of his love for and confidence in Onesimus. He tells Philemon that any debt owed him by Onesimus is to be put on Paul's account. (Again, that is exactly what Christ did for us—the debt for our sin was put to His account.)

Philem. 1:19 I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

Paul guarantees in his own handwriting that he will repay Onesimus' debt. (Again, Jesus paid our debt on the cross.) Then Paul shows more of his human nature—he reminds Philemon that he owes his very soul to Paul. (Paul was evidently the one that showed him the way to eternal life.)

Philem. 1:20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

It's obvious to me that Paul is very secure in his relationship with Philemon. He appeals to Philemon on the grounds that his positive response will bring Paul joy and refreshment. He knows that this request carries more weight because of their relationship in the Lord.

Philem. 1:21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

Paul feels like he knows Philemon so well that the fact of his responding positively is not even a question. He knows that he will do even more than is requested.

Fellow Christians should be able to depend on Christ-like responses to one another in all areas of life. On the other hand, we shouldn't have to worry about fellow Christians taking advantage of our relationship in the Lord to accomplish selfishly-motivated agendas.

Philem. 1:22 But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

Paul begins to close his letter and shares his hope to visit with them soon. He asks that they prepare him a place to stay—Why? Because he is confident that their prayers on his behalf will be answered by God. Paul evidently believed that God was responsive to our prayers in areas other than need. It also points out that our prayers should include specific requests. I think I sometimes – oft times – hesitate to ask for things I want because it seems so selfish when God has given me so much. But when I think of it in relationship to the fact that I am His child, I can better relate. I know that it brings me great joy when I can do for my children in any way that brings them happiness. There's nothing wrong with asking for things we want as long as our attitude remains unchanged when the answer is "no" or "wait."

Philem. 1:23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

Philem. 1:24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

Paul sends greetings from Epaphras, another brother in the faith who is in prison with him. Then he adds greetings from other Christians who are laboring with him—Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke. I think it is interesting to note that God always seemed to provide Christian fellowship for Paul no matter how terrible the circumstances that were allowed to befall him. I think part of this was to provide a witness to God's sufficiency in any situation, part was to facilitate the writing and dissemination of His Word thru Paul, and partly for training up those who were needed to co-labor to get the gospel out.

Philem. 1:25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen.

Paul closes with a simple prayer that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with their spirit.

Grace – undeserved favor

Lord – Master, King, authority

Jesus – God in flesh, Saviour

Christ – the Messiah, Son of God

The spirit represents the essence of who we are—not the flesh. It represents our inner being where the closest connection, the most intimate connection occurs.

Amen – So be it.