

Philemon: Lesson #48: A Master and a Slave
Notes for Parents to Study with Their Children
For Sunday, Oct. 26th

Read Philemon 1-25 (a simplified explanation of the text is supplied at the end of these notes).

Memory Verse: Philem. 4 “I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers.”

We are studying the short letter to Philemon. In order as the New Testament books are organized, Philemon comes after Titus. But it is good to study this letter now because it was sent at the same time the letter to the Colossians was. Both letters say that...

- Paul was imprisoned,
- Timothy was writing with him,
- Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke were with Paul,
- Onesimus, Philemon’s slave, is being sent back in both letters,
- Archippus is mentioned as being at Colossae and with Philemon.

It makes sense to believe that Philemon was a Christian who lived in Colossae, a man Paul knew very well and loved.

Greetings to Philemon

- Paul and Timothy sends his greetings in this letter to Philemon and his family. A woman is mentioned, Apphia, who may be Philemon’s wife or relative. A man is mentioned, Archippus who might be Philemon’s son or maybe a brother. Archippus is also mentioned in Colossians 4:17 as having a service he should be careful to fulfill. It is possible that he was the preacher at Colossae during this time.
- We also find out that the Colossian church met in Philemon’s house (vs. 2).

Complimenting Philemon

- Though Paul had to criticize people sometimes, he was also always quick to tell what he knew that was good about people.
- Paul speaks of Philemon’s faith and the love he shows toward God’s people. He evidently was a very good man who impressed Paul a lot.
- Later Paul said that Philemon had been his partner, or one who shared with him in his work. That sometimes meant that someone had supported Paul with money as he preached God’s Word.
- Paul said that he prayed for Philemon and thanked God for his good example.

Paul’s Request About Onesimus

- Paul pleads with Philemon the master to forgive his runaway slave, Onesimus, and take him back.
- Onesimus had come to Rome where he came in contact with Paul. Paul had been able to teach Onesimus the gospel and he became a Christian.

- Onesimus did a lot of nice things for Paul while he was in prison and Paul loved him very much. But since Onesimus belonged to Philemon, Paul sent him back home to face his master, but along with him Paul sends this letter.
- Philemon was asked by Paul to take Onesimus back, not just as a servant, but as a brother in Christ.
- Paul even told Philemon that if Onesimus had ever stolen anything, Paul would repay it.
- He told Philemon what joy it would bring his heart and that he had confidence that Philemon would obey him.
- When someone has done something to hurt you, it can be hard to forgive them. Some people never forgive anyone, they just always have bad feelings toward them. Philemon had a good reason to be upset at Onesimus, but Onesimus had changed and it was Philemon's duty to forgive him.

Simplified Explanation of the Text

Paul Writes to Philemon and His Family

- 1 Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, along with brother Timothy, to Philemon, who is our dear friend and one who works together with us.
- 2 And to our beloved Apphia, as well as Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church meeting in your house.
3. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanks for the Good Philemon Has Done

- 4-5 I thank my God for you always remembering you in my prayers, having heard of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and to all of those who God has set apart for His service.
- 6 I pray that the fellowship of your faith will become effective in the knowledge you have of all the good things that are in Christ Jesus.
- 7 Your love has given us a great amount of pleasure and encouragement because the saints have been inwardly refreshed by you, brother.

Paul Asks Philemon to Receive Onesimus as a Brother

- 8-10 Now because of your love, I have something I want you to do. Though I could be very bold and order you to do this for me, instead let me approach you in love. I, Paul the elderly and a prisoner of Jesus Christ, am pleading with you in behalf of my son, Onesimus. I speak of him as my son because I have met up with him while imprisoned and have taught him the truth causing him to be born again in the gospel.
- 11 Onesimus's name may mean "useful", but I know that in time past your servant was not useful to you at all. But since his conversion he has become very useful to me, and can be to you, too.
- 12 I am sending him back; so take back this one who is my very heart.
- 13 If I had my way, he would have stayed here to serve me while I am imprisoned for the gospel.

14 But I wouldn't do that without you knowing about it. I wouldn't want you to feel like you had to do this good thing. I would rather you choose to do it willingly.

15 Why was it that he broke away from you for this period of time? Perhaps, in God's providence, it was so that I could meet up with him and win him to Christ. Then when he came back, he would really be yours forever.

16 I mean you would have him back no longer just a servant, but much more than a servant, a beloved brother. He has certainly become that to me, but that would be even more significant to you – he would be yours in the flesh and in the Lord.

17 If then you have fellowship with me, receive him back like you would me.

18 But if he wronged you or owes you anything, consider it as something I owe you.

19 In my own handwriting, I make you a promise that I, Paul, will repay you. And we won't even discuss how you owe me your own life.

20 Yes, brother, I'm asking you to bring joy to my heart and let me feel refreshed by your response.

If His Prayers Are Answered, Paul Will Come See Philemon

21 I'm confident that you will obey what I've written; in fact, I know that you will do even more than I've asked.

22 So would you also be preparing me a place to stay. My hope is that God will answer your prayers and give me to you.

23-24 Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus greets you, and so does Mark, Aristarcus, Demas and Luke who all are working with me.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with your spirit.