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Philemon 1

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Philemon 1.

Topics.

- The church in Philemon's house.
- Paul's prayer for Philemon.
- Inner grace and faith made outwardly visible.
- Paul asks Philemon to take Onesimus back.
- Paul offers to pay any debt Onesimus owed Philemon.
- Prepare a guest house.

INTRODUCTION: Philemon is about reconciliation, and relationships between Christians. Onesimus (which means useful) was a slave of a believer named Philemon in Colosse. Apparently Onesimus had stolen from Philemon and fled the city at some point while Paul was under arrest in Rome. Onesimus met him and became a Christian. Paul wrote this letter about A.D. 60 and gave it to Onesimus to carry back to Philemon. In the letter Paul appealed to Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his household, but as a brother in the Lord rather than a slave. In Paul's estimation, Onesimus was far more useful (v11) now that he was a Christian. Paul even promised to pay whatever debt Onesimus might owe to Philemon.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

PHILEMON 1:1-2

The Church in Philemon's House.

- **Philemon 1:1-2:** Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ²and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

Timothy: was a young man acquainted with the Scriptures from childhood who Paul loved as a protective father and mentored in the Gospel of Christ.

Paul is writing the letter from a prison in Rome, which is the the reason for his introduction, "A prisoner of Jesus Christ" (v1) meaning he is in prison because of his faith in Jesus. To simply be a prisoner is neither comfort nor honour, but such as Paul was a prisoner for the faith and preaching of the Gospel this was true glory. Epaphras is in prison with Paul (v23) while it appears Timothy, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke though not in prison are able to visit them (v1, 24). It is interesting to notice the different titles Paul gives those in the family of Christ, workers and soldiers workers is a title given to all those who serve the Lord without persecution, whereas soldiers, is the title given to those who serve God in the face of persecution and opposition. The glory of the Christian faith is that whether a worker or soldier, both are beloved in the Lord and both will receive a crown of eternal glory. The letter is also addressed to:

- Philemon (this is the only mention of Philemon).
- Apphia who was a Christian woman of Coloss' (this is only mentions of Apphia).

- Archippus who was a disciple at Colosse (this verse and (Col. 4:17) are the only verses that cites Archippus).

NOTE: though Paul addresses this letter to Philemon, Apphia and Archippus he is primarily writing it with Philemon in mind since the whole focus of the letter is about asking Philemon to receive Onesimus his runaway slave who had stolen from him back under his care.

The church in your house: the church was in Philemon house (v2) as almost every church in the New Testament was. The observant reader as they journey through the writings of the apostles and Paul will notice that though the word church is mentioned many times there is no mention of any church buildings.

House churches: there is in the secular global world today a mindset that the church is a Sunday meeting in a religious building but the church should never be limited to the established religious institutions, denominations or church buildings though they may form a part of the body of Christ they are not the only part. There are many individual Christians in all countries of the world who meet in coffee bars, social outings and mostly their own homes (as the early church did) to give thanks to Christ and share their discoveries of God's word and their spiritual experiences with Him. Many of these people are helping others and simply manifesting the reality of their faith to the people that come into their lives. God is not limited to any one pattern or organisation; He is far too creative for that. Jesus church is global and is manifested in a vast variety of ways across the face of the earth. In many third world countries church is held outside under a tree (for shade) with its members sitting on the dusty ground often with dogs, chooks and other animals roaming around.

The global family of God: since the Bible was written in an entirely different culture to ours and the body of Christ is a global family filled with people from different nations, countries, cultures, backgrounds, knowledge, levels of education, hurts and troubled pasts there is always going to be certain amount of Scripture we will all understand differently. Paul in the book of Romans tells us to avoid those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine that he taught the brothers and sisters in Rome. In the context of the entire letter that he wrote to the Roman brothers and sisters the doctrines he had in mind when he said, "Avoid those who cause divisions" are the following three:

1. Doctrines that are contrary to the teaching that salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ contrasted to works of the law, self-effort and keeping religious customs and traditions etc.
2. Doctrines that are contrary to the truth that Jews and Gentiles who accept Christ become one nation in Christ, contrasted to them being two separate nations.
3. Doctrines which are contrary to godly behaviour and lead people away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are the three major topics Paul has focused on in his letter to the brothers and sisters in Rome and the doctrines he has in his mind when he says be careful of those who cause divisions and create obstacles. Naturally within the global House of God there are many varied understandings of many Scripture, but not all teachings are important to know to be saved to eternal life nor does one have to have perfect understanding of every teaching from Genesis to Revelation to know Christ and be in union with him, but of course we must all understand the message of the cross and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. No-one has to be a walking Bible encyclopaedia to be in the family of Christ and saved to eternal life, but should any teacher proclaim a message of works and self-effort to be saved or teach that Jews and Gentiles are two separate groups/nations in Christ, or teach doctrines that lead people away from godly behaviour and from Christ Paul says they should be avoided (Rom 16:17-19).

NOTE: though the visible global church in many regions has not presented a good reflection of Christ to the secular world, it should always be remembered that there are literally hundreds of thousands of humble Christian brothers and sisters in Christ spending their time helping the poor and the less fortunate, but sadly this type of news does not attract the attention of global TV news media since there is no profit to be made in good news. The body is the reflection of Christ on earth and therefore should be walking in the same Spirit of love, kindness, compassion and grace etc. that Christ walked in while on earth.

For further information see the title:

- Church (The Definitions of a Church).

In, Various Topics (ON WEBSITE MENU).

PHILEMON 1:3-5

Paul's Greetings to Philemon.

- **Philemon 1:3-5:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
⁴I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints.

Paul's words, "I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and all the saints" (v5) express the most glorious testimony any brother or sister in Christ could ever wish to hear especially from someone with the standing Paul had before the Lord. Philemon is not only credited for his love, faithfulness and devotion toward the Lord, but also toward his brothers and sisters in Christ. It is certain that this does not only refer to those who Philemon considered his friends since there is no praise in loving them since that comes naturally, rather Paul's praise toward Philemon is not just because he has shown love, compassion and mercy to those who love him, but because he has shown grace to all who love Christ despite their differences in personality, ideas and thinking.

There is no-doubt the Lord Jesus Christ will be able to crown multitudes of Christians for their faithfulness and devotion that they have had for him, but those who the Lord will enjoy crowning the most are not just those who have loved him, but those who have also shown great love toward his brothers and sisters despite the differences. This most likely one of the reasons why Paul says he constantly thanks God in his prayers for Philemon.

PHILEMON 1:6

Paul's Prayer for Philemon.

- **Philemon 1:6:** and I pray that the sharing of your faith (communication of thy faith in KJV) may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

Paul in this prayer for Philemon is praying that:

- All Christ's goodness that is in him would be communicated and manifested outwardly to those he shares his faith with.
- That he would get the right and proper acceptance, acknowledgment and recognition for all the good that he has done for the Christian faith.
- In his sharing of the faith he would make it common to others (i.e., Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, noble and lowly) so that everyone clearly knows they are able to enjoy the treasures and fruits of it.

Paul is praying that the sharing of Philemon faith will be outwardly expressed in those who receive it by good fruits so that their faith would be shown to be true and not simply an intellectual or emotional response. It is a prayer that desires that the faith that dwells within will not remain dead, but manifest itself in good works for the benefit of others, for although faith has its proper seat in the heart it communicates itself to others by good works.

The meaning of Paul's prayer for Philemon is that God would make his devotion, love, goodness and inner faith, known and common to all by it being clearly manifested outwardly through good deeds toward others so that not only would all acknowledge that Philemon's faith was genuine and efficacious, but also Christ's name, the Gospel and the Christian faith would be well spoken off.

Inner grace and faith made outwardly visible: the grace of faith that dwells in the inner man of those who have Christ seated as King on the throne of their heart and mind cannot communicate the beauty of this grace to another; a believing parent cannot communicate it to their children, nor a master to their servants, nor a minister to their hearers; except by the following two outward manifestations:

1. By its outward expressions of joy, peace and contentment in the brother or sister.
2. By its outward flowing of love, compassion, kindness manifested in doing good to others in works and words of encouragement.

There is no doubt multitudes of Christians have the goodness of Christ dwelling in their hearts, but it can only be made manifest by their showing kindness to others. The truth that is revealed in this prayer of Paul's is that when faith exists in the heart, it is very desirable that it should impart its proper fruits toward others in such a way that all may see the light, the glory, the beauty and the power it has on the inside of the human body regardless of what our frame may look like on the outside. In other words when true faith exists it should be manifested in such a manner that its possessor may be acknowledged to be under God's influence of love, compassion, mercy and grace.

CONCLUSION: Paul's prayer for Philemon is that he may have all the credit and honour which the goodness of his heart is entitled to and that he would have many more opportunities to show the world how much his life was governed by his faith in Christ and the Lord's love dwelling within.

PHILEMON 1:7

Philemon gives Paul great Joy.

- **Philemon 1:7:** For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

The following two things can be safely determined from Paul's expression of joy over the testimony that he had heard regarding Philemon:

1. Those who attended the church in his house (v2) were encouraged in their hearts, their minds and strengthened in their faith in the Lord because of Philemon.
2. Philemon had the wisdom of character and in his teaching to maintain a spirit of peace kindness and unity flowing through the church in his home.

Paul's words, "The saints have been refreshed through you" (v7) are not limited to spiritual refreshing in faith, happiness and joy, but also include the works of charity in which Philemon and his church abounded in giving to the poor.

Paul begins to make his appeal for Onesimus, to Philemon.

- **Philemon 1:8-13:** Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹²I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel,

Onesimus: is the only other mention of Onesimus is in (Col. 4:9) in which Paul refers to him as a faithful and beloved brother.

Philemon was a brother in Christ who not only had a church in his home, but was a minister of the Gospel who Paul clearly respected and held in high esteem. He had a servant named Onesimus, who after having stolen Philemon's goods ran away from him and in his running arrived in Rome where Paul was then a prisoner for the Gospel. From Paul's words, "Onesimus, my child, whose father I became in my imprisonment" (v10) we can safely reason that Onesimus was caught as a thief and put in the same prison as Paul, but whatever the reason is not important to the story since all we need to know is that under Paul's teaching and God grace Onesimus was converted to Christ. After Onesimus conversion he became a great comfort and blessing to Paul in prison. There is no-doubt Paul would have loved Onesimus to stay with him and it is certain he could have used him, but knowing he owed a debt to another Paul sends Onesimus back with this letter of praise in which he asks Philemon to forgive Onesimus and receive him a kind welcome.

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It is the duty of every Christian to forgive, Onesimus has been converted to Christ and thereby God has by His Spirit "Delivered him from the domain of darkness and transferred him into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13). Once he was a thief now, he is a child of God. Here we see the goodness and mercy of God to a wandering sinner working through Paul who with earnestness concerns himself for the future well-being of Onesimus who is now (through Paul's preaching) reconciled to God. Paul now labours for reconciliation between Onesimus and his master Philemon. Paul knew Philemon was a good Christian man, well respected by those who attended his home church and had been told that Philemon had a love for all brothers and sisters in Christ (v5) so he clearly knew Philemon would have treated those under his authority decently and fairly and that Onesimus would have had a good and safe home environment (especially now he is a Christian brother) where he could work off the debt he owed as he grew in the Lord. Paul rather than commanding Philemon to take Onesimus back appeals to the love that Philemon has for the Lord and for his brothers and sisters in Christ.

In this story we see the endearing affection between a true convert and the one who God used to be the person of his conversion and the tender and good spirit of Paul to concern himself with a fugitive slave who has now become his son in the faith. There is no-doubt Onesimus would have gladly continued to serve Paul in prison, but being another's servant, he must return and submit himself to his master and be at his service. Paul told Philemon that he always "Remembers him in his prayers" (v4) and prayed that the "Sharing of his faith would be effective" (v6). Paul's desire was that the fellowship between Philemon and Onesimus would be restored. Thus he never ceases to mention Philemon in his prayers in order that Philemon knowledge may increase in all the goodness of Christ's Spirit that dwells within (i.e., the fruits of the Spirit) and be manifested outwardly in in compassion, mercy, grace and forgiveness toward others and thereby through earnest prayer Paul paves the way for his request on behalf of Onesimus.

Paul asks Philemon to Take Onesimus Back.

- **Philemon 1:14-17:** but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will. ¹⁵For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a slave but more than a slave (Servant in KJV) as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.

Slave: (Servant in KJV) can refer to an involuntary or voluntary slave it carries the idea of being in subjection or subserviency.

NOTICE: Paul does not presume to dogmatically state what God's will is, but rather tells Philemon perhaps it was God's will that Onesimus departed so that he might meet Paul and be converted. Paul as an apostle could have commanded Philemon to take Onesimus back and Philemon being the faithful brother he was no-doubt would have done so, but just as Christ commands no-one to turn to God, but rather invites them by love so Paul from the same Spirit appeals to the goodness of Philemon and thereby does not violate his free will as God would never violate the freewill of mankind. How glorious must these words of Paul sounded to the ears of Onesimus, "No longer a slave, but a beloved brother" (v16), but these words of grace are not limited to Onesimus only, but apply to every faithful brother and sister in Christ, all are beloved by their master and King. The words:

- Onesimus will be a benefit to Philemon both in the flesh and in the Lord (v16).

Means that he will now be a far better worker for Philemon and one he can trust, added to this he will be a great advantage to Philemon's home church thus one of the reasons Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus in the same friendly spirit as he would welcome Paul (v17). Paul as a child was taught by the best teachers in Israel, he was a highly educated and intelligent man so he clearly knows as he crafts this letter and appeals to the goodness of Philemon and his love for the Lord that he is leaving Philemon with no room to refuse his request. This shows the great love and trust Paul had for Onesimus, he cared about his future and desired the best for him and after hearing all the good reports regarding Philemon knew that living with and serving Philemon and being part of his home church and thereby enjoying the fellowship of the faithful brothers and sisters who attended Philemon house church would be the best outcome for Onesimus.

PHILEMON 1:18-21

Paul offers to Pay any Debt Onesimus Owed Philemon.

- **Philemon 1:18-21:** If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Paul's words to Philemon, "To say nothing of you owing me even your own self" (v19) indicate that Paul may have converted Philemon. Paul a master of words continues to make it near impossible for Philemon to refuse his request. Paul not only reminds him that he owes Paul his life, but that he will even pay any debt Onesimus owes him. This confidence and trust that Paul has in a man who was once a thief shows the power of God's Spirit to totally change a person's life. When a sinner humbles themselves

before God in honest repentance and surrenders their life to Christ Jesus the eternal Saviour who with open arms accepts in love and grace all who come to him their lives will be transformed as was Onesimus. It is certain Onesimus would have been humbled and embarrassed to return to the man who he had stolen from, no doubt this is one of the reasons Paul is writing such a beautiful letter of commendation on Onesimus behalf.

PHILEMON 1:22

Prepare a Guest House.

- **Philemon 1:22:** At the same time, prepare a guest room for me for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

Paul is hoping to spend some time living with Philemon and fellowshiping with the church in his home this is how much of the Gospel was spread during the early church era. Men like Paul well versed in the Gospel would visit the churches which at this time were mostly in brothers and sisters' houses and stay with them for some time teaching those who attended the home church. People didn't just rock up on Sunday, the home was open every day for people (saved and unsaved) to visit and be taught the Gospel. No-doubt friends, neighbours, and those who attended the home church would invite those they knew and the strangers who visited their towns to the meetings especially when they knew men of Paul's standing were coming. This was one of the ways (there were many others) in which the churches in the towns and cities grew daily.

PHILEMON 1:23-25

Paul sends greetings from Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke.

- **Philemon 1:23-25:** Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you ²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Paul sends final greetings from Mark, Aristarchus, Demas Luke all faithful brothers working for Christ's Kingdom and Epaphras who was a labourer with Paul and faithful minister of Christ (Col. 1:7) (Col. 4:12) and no-doubt in prison with Paul for the same reason (i.e., proclaiming the Gospel of Christ).

The glory, wonder and splendour of God's word: many might think that it is remarkable that God would consider such a personal and short letter to be preserved in the cannon of Scriptures since it is a letter to a particular person and of a private personal matter, regarding the receiving of a thief and runaway servant into the favour and family of the master he had betrayed and wounded and therefore appears of little concern to the church. Yet God has inspired the minds of those who put the cannon of the Bible together to preserve it. Though this letter is personal and private it is a story of conversion and forgiveness something that is common to all salvation, here we see:

- A sinner who was a useless servant to his master (v11) in the same way mankind is useless to God while in a rebellious and unbelieving state.
- The rich and free grace for the encouragement and comfort of sinners, looking to God for mercy and forgiveness.
- Instruction to ministers and brothers and sisters in Christ not to despise or judge the final state of any person nor consider them as if they were utter castaways, but rather share their faith with compassion, kindness and grace in the hope that they may be saved.

- Though there is joy on earth, as well as in heaven, over one sinner who repents they must not only be taught in spiritual matters, but also helped with the outward concerns of their lives and welfare as much as possible.
- On the part of the newly converted they must be humble and grateful and where possible make right the wrongs they have done and live a life of doing what is right and good.

We, like Onesimus, were revolters from God's service, and had injured Him in his rights. Jesus Christ finds us and by his grace works a change in us and then as Paul interceded on behalf of Onesimus for Philemon to forgive and receive him Jesus likewise intercedes on our behalf with the Father that we may be received into his favour and his eternal family and that our past offences may be forgiven.

FOOTNOTE

Paul did not command Philemon to take Onesimus back since he desired that Philemon would respond from love (v8-9) and not from compulsion, but from his own goodness and free will (v14). Some Bible scholars point out the fact that no-where in the Bible is it stated that to be saved to eternal life a person must have a personal relationship with Christ. They point out that the Bible proclaims that to be saved we must believe that Jesus died for our trespasses and rose again (a true statement), but then say as long as someone is intellectually believing this truth having a spiritual relationship with Christ is irrelevant to salvation. But, if someone truly believes Christ laid down his life to a brutal, bloody and cruel death that they could be saved by grace to eternal glory it is impossible not to have love for such a person. No one needs to be commanded to love someone who showers them with such great love. Everyone who perceives the message of the cross and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will have a personal spiritual relationship of love with the Lord Jesus Christ. No one needs a Scripture to command them to walk in love with the one who laid his life down for them since it naturally happens. God at creation has imprinted the human in such a manner that it does not need to be told or commanded to respond to love (especially unconditional love) it just automatically does because of the way in which we are emotionally created. God desires our response to His unconditional love in Christ to be a willing response flowing up to Him as a sweet-smelling fragrance of love that spontaneously springs from the uttermost depth of our heart and not from the letter of the law.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
