

MORE THAN A SLAVE

A Study of Philemon

Study #1 Salutation (Philemon 1-3)

1 Παῦλος δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφὸς Φιλήμονι τῷ ἀγαπητῷ καὶ συνεργῷ ἡμῶν
2 καὶ Ἀπφία τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ Ἀρχίππῳ τῷ συστρατιώτῃ ἡμῶν κατ' οἶκόν σου ἐκκλησία,
3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

I. REVIEW

- A. Four of Paul's New Testament letters are called *prison epistles* because they were written between 60-63 AD, while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. They are: *Ephesians*, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon* (cf. *Ephesians* 3:1; *Philippians* 1:7; *Colossians* 4:3; *Philemon* 1; et al).
- B. All four of these *prison epistles* were written between ca. 60-63 during Paul's *first* Roman imprisonment, from which he was later released (cf. *Philippians* 1:19-26; *Philemon* 22). Subsequently he was imprisoned a second time, leading to his execution, as he expresses in *2 Timothy* (2 *Timothy* 4:6-8).
- C. *Philemon* and *Colossians* are closely related by the fact that Philemon, the recipient of the letter bearing his name, was apparently a member of the Colossian church, which met in his house.

II. INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL (REVIEW OF NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES)

- A. There are two "groups" of epistles or letters in the New Testament. They are:
 1. Pauline (or Paul's) Epistles = These thirteen letters are all named for their recipients (nine for churches; four for individuals). In the order of New Testament letters Paul's come first, starting with *Romans* and ending with *Philemon* (these are not ordered chronologically in the Bible); and,
 2. General Epistles = These eight letters are named for their writers rather than their recipients (except for *Hebrews*, whose writer is unknown). These come last in the New Testament canon, starting with *Hebrews* and ending with *Jude*.
- B. *Philemon* is Paul's shortest letter in the New Testament, and one of his most intimate...though it is not the shortest of all the letters in the New Testament (which distinction belongs to *3 John*).
- C. New Testament letters, with only a few exceptions, follow the same basic structure or pattern:
 1. Salutation, or opening, which usually contains three parts:
 - a. Identification of the writer;
 - b. Identification of the recipient(s); and,
 - c. A brief greeting.
 2. Body, which is the main substance of the letter.
 3. Closing comments, usually containing some final greetings and/or a benediction.

III. TEXT: PHILEMON 1-3

- A. *verse 1* = Paul identifies himself, his ministry companion Timothy, and identifies one of the recipients of the letter, Philemon.
 1. "Paul..." = The writer of this, and twelve other, New Testament letters.

- a. *Acts 7:58–8:3* = Saul, a young Jewish man, was absolutely against Christianity, and active in persecuting the fledgling Christian church.
 - b. *Acts 9:1-31* = Saul was miraculously converted and commissioned for ministry.
 - c. *Acts 13:9* = Saul was also known as Paul.
 - d. *Galatians 1:13-14* = Paul describes his success and renown in Judaism prior to his salvation.
 - e. *Philippians 3:4-11* = Paul expresses his view, following salvation, of all that he was and had in Judaism, and his willingness following his encounter with Christ, to give it all up.
 - f. *1 Corinthians 15:9-10* = Paul considered himself the least of the apostles because of his past, but he was *still* an apostle.
 - g. *2 Corinthians 11:22—12:4* = Paul describes some of the hardship he endured after salvation, as he fulfilled his call to apostleship.
 - h. *Galatians 1:1* = His commission as an apostle was directly from God, and as such he had apostolic authority:
 - i. *Philemon 8* = As an apostle, Paul had the authority and confidence to order Philemon to do what was right (although in this case he refrained).
 - ii. *2 Peter 3:15-16* = The Apostle Peter considered Paul's writing to be authoritative and on par with the rest of the Scriptures.
2. "...**a prisoner**..." = At the time of writing (ca. 60-63 AD), Paul was a prisoner on house arrest in Rome, as we discussed in our last study.
3. "...**of Christ Jesus**..." = (see *Philemon 9* for the same phrase) Though Paul was imprisoned by *Rome* at the hands of the *Jews*, he recognized that his imprisonment was:
 - a. God's will (cf. *Acts 9:15-16, 22:10, 23:11*), and was
 - b. Because of his witness about Christ (cf. *Luke 21:12-19; John 15:18-25; Acts 5:40-42, 21:13; 1 Peter 4:14-16*).
4. "...**and Timothy our brother**..." = This does not imply that Timothy was a co-author of the letter, but he was identified here for his presence and solidarity with Paul in his reason for writing. Timothy is mentioned by name twenty-four times in the New Testament, and is included in the salutations of six of Paul's letters (*2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon*).
 - a. *Acts 16:1-3* = Timothy, a young believer, met Paul on the apostle's second journey, and he began traveling with Paul. He became an integral part of Paul's life and ministry (*Philippians 2:19-22*), as *Acts* records, and Paul frequently referred to him in his letters. Two of those letters were actually written to Timothy (*1 and 2 Timothy*), including Paul's last letter in which he asked Timothy to come to him in Rome before Paul's execution (*2 Timothy 4:21*).
5. "...**to Philemon**..." = The primary recipient of the letter. We know very little about him, except that he was wealthy, a slave owner, and a member of the Colossian church which met in his house.
6. "...**our beloved brother**..." = The word "brother" is supplied to give the sense, but does not appear in the Greek manuscripts. Still, Paul felt a warmth and affection for Philemon, which will become more evident as we move into the letter. More to the point, Philemon had a solid reputation with the church, and was beloved by the body.
7. "...**and fellow worker**..." = Paul considered Philemon a fellow laborer in the faith (cf. *Philemon 5-7*). He was obviously active in the ministry.
- B. *verse 2* = Paul identifies the other recipients of the letter.
1. "...**and to Apphia our sister**..." = This likely refers to Philemon's wife. Beyond the fact that she was a believer (cf. "our sister"), we know nothing about her.
 2. "...**and to Archippus**..." = This was likely Philemon's son, who was also clearly active in the ministry (cf. *Colossians 4:17*), perhaps even the pastor of the Colossian church.

3. “...**our fellow soldier**...” = Archippus was a fellow soldier in the spiritual battle that all believers face, especially those involved in pastoral ministry (for other uses of this type of warfare terminology, see *1 Timothy 1:18* and *2 Timothy 2:3-4, 4:6-7*).
 4. “...**and to the church in your house**...” = It is worth noting that this very personal letter (and the appeal it contains) was addressed not only to Philemon, but to the church. Paul’s intent was to exert subtle pressure to encourage Philemon’s obedience in a matter that may be difficult for him. Paul does this several times, in different ways, as we will note as we move through our study of the letter. Also note that the Colossian church is here said to meet in Philemon’s house. Churches of the day met in private homes, as there were no church buildings. The one in Colossae met in Philemon’s house.
- C. *verse 3* = Paul’s salutary greeting.
1. “...**grace to you**...” = Grace is unmerited favor from God, and although this includes His grace in salvation, it refers here to the grace required to live a holy, godly life in a sinful world (cf. *Hebrews 4:16*).
 2. “...**and peace**...” = Again, the focus is on the peace experienced and manifested in the life as one submits to God in total trust (cf. *John 14:27; Romans 15:13; Philippians 4:6-7*).
 3. “...**from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**...” = The source of grace and peace is God. It is *His* enabling grace and mercy we need for life, and only *He* can bring a real, lasting and experiential peace. It was Paul’s wish for his readers to experience these things.

IV. CONCLUSION

- A. Are *you* experiencing God’s grace and peace in your life? If not, might you want to carefully and prayerfully consider your relationship with Jesus Christ?

V. PRAYER