

MORE THAN A SLAVE

A Study of Philemon

Study #6

Closing Comments

(Philemon 21-25)

21 Πεποιθὼς τῆ ὑπακοῇ σου ἔγραψά σοι, εἰδὼς ὅτι καὶ ὑπὲρ ἃ λέγω ποιήσεις.

22 ὅμα δὲ καὶ ἐτοιμάξέ μοι ξενίαν· ἐλπίζω γὰρ ὅτι διὰ τῶν προσευχῶν ὑμῶν χαρισθήσομαι ὑμῖν.

23 Ἀσπάξεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

24 Μᾶρκος, Ἀρίσταρχος, Δημᾶς, Λουκᾶς, οἱ συνεργοί μου.

25 Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ὑμῶν.

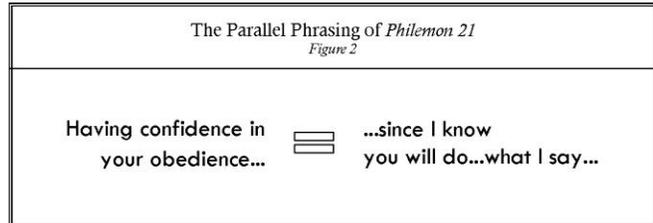
I. INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

- A. Paul has urged his friend and fellow worker, Philemon, to forgive and restore his runaway slave, Onesimus (verse 17).
- B. Paul has offered to personally pay Onesimus's debt to Philemon, in an effort to remove any barrier to complete forgiveness and restoration.
- C. Now Paul expresses his confidence in Philemon's obedience, and gives an additional incentive for obedience.
- D. And finally, Paul closes with greetings from mutual friends and fellow workers.

II. TEXT: PHILEMON 21-25

- A. *verse 21* = Using two closely paralleled statements, Paul expresses his confidence that his letter will have its desired consequence.
 1. “**Having confidence in your obedience...**” = Paul has every reason to believe that Philemon will obey his request (cf. *2 Corinthians 2:3; Galatians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:4*). This confidence is rooted in the fact that Philemon's godly character is well-known and widely-demonstrated (see *verses 4-5, 7*). Such demonstration has persuaded Paul of Philemon's willingness to act in the proper manner.
 - a. “**...obedience...**” = (Greek *hupakoe*) The picture is to submit oneself to what has been heard, to place oneself under the words of another. It is actually a rather strong word. Though Paul has gone to great lengths to be gentle and somewhat unassuming in dealing with Philemon, he is still an apostle. Adherence to his appeal is a form of obedience. In fact, he has given three commands so far in this letter (a fourth is coming): accept [Onesimus]; charge [me, Paul]; and refresh [my heart]. It is incumbent upon Philemon to obey, and Paul is persuaded by his proven character that he will.
 2. “**...I write to you...**” = This is a reminder of the personal closeness between Paul and Philemon. Paul regularly addresses such issues directly, rather than through a third party. We sometimes reflect the attitude that “someone else will deal with it,” when God has, in fact, called *us* to deal with it. Laziness or dislike of confrontation causes us to shirk our duty. But it is important that we be ready to personally intervene when God calls us to it.
 - a. “**...you...**” = English has only one second-person pronoun, *you*. It is used for both singular and plural constructions. Greek, however, uses different forms for singular (*su*) and plural (*humeis*). In this very personal letter, the plural form is used only four times (*verses 3, 22 [twice], and 25*). The singular form, by contrast, is used eighteen times! This is obviously intended to be a very personal letter.
 3. “**...since I know that you will do even more than what I say...**” = This phrase is very similar to the opening phrase of the verse. The two halves form what is known as parallel phrasing (see *Figure 2*

below). There is, however, a remarkable addition here: Paul indicates his confidence that Philemon will go even beyond simple forgiveness, and do *more* than what Paul has asked. The question is, what does Paul have in mind? What would be *more* than Paul asks? Some have suggested that Paul was intimating that Philemon should release Onesimus from slavery. This may be possible, but it would seem incongruous with some of Paul's other writings. More likely, Paul leaves his assertion intentionally vague and unspecified. He simply gives a prompt, as it were, and expects that Philemon's conscience will lead him to do for Onesimus whatever *more* the Holy Spirit might direct of him. Though perhaps Philemon might be led to free Onesimus, it seems unlikely that this is specifically Paul's intent. Paul often addresses the responsibilities of slaves and masters—but it would be unprecedented in the New Testament for him to instruct or expect a master to free a slave.



- a. *Ephesians 6:5-9* = Note the conspicuous lack of condemnation toward slavery. Paul simply addresses it as it exists in his time, and instructs believers how to function in such a system, regardless on which side of that system's spectrum they live (cf. *Colossians 3:22—4:1*; *1 Timothy 6:1-2*; *Titus 2:9-10*; and for a different writer's perspective, *1 Peter 2:18* and following).
 - b. *1 Corinthians 7:17-24* = Here, Paul admonishes us to live in whatever state we were called. Though slaves were often given the chance to effect their freedom, and were free to do so biblically, the principle remains that salvation changes our *spiritual* condition, but not necessarily our *physical* circumstances. Note that this truth flatly contradicts the claims of many modern preachers who claim that God promises prosperity and earthly good during this present, temporal life.
- B. *verse 22* = Here is Paul's final application of pressure (including the letter's fourth and final command). Incidentally, from this point on, every second-person pronoun (*you*) is plural. Paul has shifted, then, from addressing Philemon individually, to addressing the Colossian church that met in his home.
1. **"At the same time also..."** = (Greek *hama*) This unique and hard to translate little word is used only nine times in the New Testament, and always expresses a certain sense of urgency (cf. *Matthew 20:1*).
 2. **"...prepare me a lodging..."** = Here is Paul's final imperative or command. Paul reveals his expectation of release from prison. He expects to visit Colossae soon, and intends to lodge with Philemon. This would be a great honor and blessing for Philemon—but also an added pressure on him to comply with Paul's request. Paul himself would be there soon, and would see firsthand how Philemon had decided to handle the situation.
 3. **"...for I hope...I will be given to you..."** = There are essentially two points here:
 - a. First, Paul expects to be released from prison soon. This is a clear indication that this is a different imprisonment than we read about in *2 Timothy*. There, he expects to be executed (*2 Timothy 2:8-9, 4:6-8*), whereas here, he clearly expects to be released (see *Philippians 1:19-26, 2:24*). Another indication of this difference is the role of Demas, who, during Paul's first imprisonment, is a faithful friend as we will see in a moment (see also *Colossians 4:14*). But by the time of the second imprisonment, Demas had apparently abandoned and deserted Paul (*2 Timothy 4:9-10*).
 - b. Second, Paul considers his impending visit to Philemon in Colossae to be the result of the grace of God. The word translated *be given to you* (Greek *charizomai*) connotes the grace bestowed by the giver of the gift. In other words, Paul does not look at his coming visit as one of merely "checking up" on Philemon to be sure he has done what Paul has asked. No, the visit will be a great blessing and encouragement to both men, a gift of God's grace.
 4. **"...through your prayers..."** = The New Testament teaches that the prayers of believers are uniquely effective (*James 5:16b-18*). Paul expects that others are praying for him, and believes that those prayers will result in his deliverance from incarceration (*Philippians 1:18b-19*). Further, Paul expressly teaches that believers should be fervent and consistent in their prayer lives (*Ephesians 6:18-19*; *Philippians 4:6-7*; *Colossians 4:2-4*; *1 Thessalonians 5:17*). James says that believers miss out on certain provision because

- we fail to ask for it (*James 4:2b-3*). And Jesus Himself addressed this issue often (*Matthew 6:5-13; Luke 11:5-10, 18:1-8*). A rich, fertile and vibrant prayer life is one of the hallmarks of a growing believer.
- C. *verse 23* = In *verses 23-24*, Paul mentions greetings from five individuals. All five are also mentioned in *Colossians*, and would likely have been well-known to Philemon and the Colossian church. *Verse 23* focuses on one man, Epaphras.
1. “**Epaphras...**” = This was the man used by God to establish the Colossian church (*Colossians 1:7-8*), of which he was also a part. Paul speaks very highly of him (*Colossians 4:12-13*) and of his involvement in the Colossian church.
 2. “**...my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus...**” = It is unclear whether Epaphras was also physically incarcerated (see *Colossians 4:10* where Paul refers to Aristarchus using the same phrase), or whether he was simply identified closely with Paul in Paul’s imprisonment (cf. *Hebrews 13:3*).
 3. “**...greet you...**” = Whichever was the case, Epaphras sends his greetings from Rome where he is with Paul, to his friends and brothers in Colossae.
- D. *verse 24* = More of Paul’s companions send their greetings.
1. “**...as do Mark...**” = (cf. *Colossians 4:10*) This is John Mark, the writer of *Mark*. He failed Paul utterly during the first missionary journey (*Acts 13:13*); and consequently Paul refused to take him on the second journey, resulting in a split between Paul and his traveling companion, Mark’s cousin, Barnabas (*Acts 15:36-40*). Obviously, however, the apostle heeded in own instruction and forgave Mark, who was subsequently with Paul during his first imprisonment, and whom Paul even wished to have with him during the second imprisonment as well, stating his usefulness for service (*2 Timothy 4:11*).
 2. “**...Aristarchus...**” = (cf. *Colossians 4:10*) Aristarchus was a native of Thessalonica (*Acts 20:4*) who traveled extensively with Paul. For example he was with Paul during the famous shipwreck on the journey to Rome (*Acts 27:1-2*). He evidently remained faithfully at Paul’s side.
 3. “**...Demas...**” = (cf. *Colossians 4:14*) He started well. But in the exact reverse of John Mark, by the end he had apostatized (*2 Timothy 4:9-10*).
 4. “**...Luke...**” = (cf. *Colossians 4:14*) The writer of *Luke* and *Acts*, he was a trained physician who ministered to Paul in his travels. At the end of Paul’s life, Luke was the only companion still with him (see *2 Timothy 4:11*).
 5. “**...my fellow workers...**” = Paul was not alone in ministry. These men had a part in the work, and Paul considered them important fellow workers, as Philemon was (*verse 1*) and as we are (*1 Corinthians 3:9*). None of us succeeds alone, in life or in ministry.
- E. *verse 25* = The closing greeting from Paul.
1. “**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ...**” = That is, His enabling grace that allows us to function in line with His will for us, despite difficult circumstances (cf. *2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Hebrews 4:14-16*).
 2. “**...be with your spirit.**” = Because of this enabling grace, our inward man, our *spirit*, is flourishing though the outward man may be decaying (*2 Corinthians 4:16-18*).

III. CONCLUSION

- A. Did Philemon forgive Onesimus? It is impossible to say for sure. But the letter which was sent to Philemon personally was preserved, passed on from the recipient to the universal church. It seems unlikely that Philemon would have shared and preserved the letter had he not complied with its tender appeal.
- B. What became of Onesimus? The early church father, Ignatius, says that a man named Onesimus later became the pastor/bishop of the church in Ephesus. We can’t say for absolute certain that this was the same man...but it seems likely, and if so, what a fitting conclusion to a beautiful story of betrayal, redemption, forgiveness and restoration!

IV. PRAYER