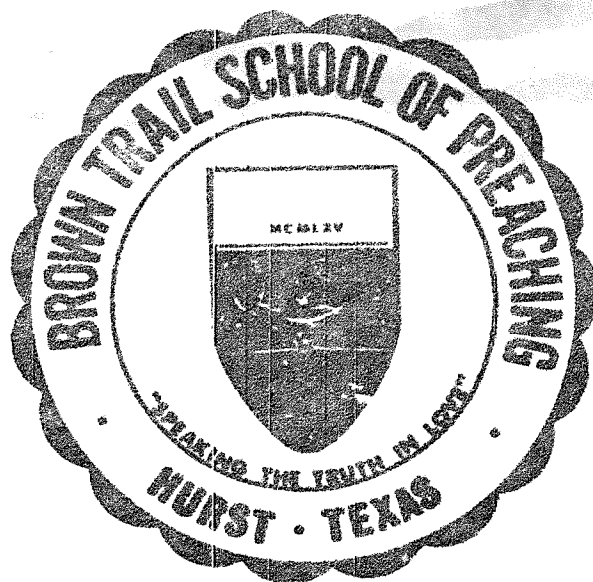


PHILEMON



ROY DEEVER

THE BOOK OF PHILEMON

by Roy C. Deaver

- I. Author? The Holy Spirit.
- II. The writer? Paul.
- III. Written from? Rome, where Paul was a prisoner.
- IV. Written to: Philemon, principally.
- V. Written when? 62 a.d. One of the four prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon).
- VI. Written Why? Onesimus was a slave, belonging to Philemon, of Colossae.

Onesimus had run away, had made his way to Rome, and had come in contact with the apostle Paul. Through Paul, Onesimus had become a Christian. Paul had come to have deep regard for this man, and wanted to keep him with him, but would not do so without the consent of Philemon. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, in company with Tychicus, and also wrote a special letter in his behalf. Paul asked Philemon to receive him "as a brother," and expressed confidence that Philemon would do even more than this. Paul wrote to request a Christian reception for Onesimus.

SKELETON OUTLINE OF PHILEMON

PURPOSE: To request a Christian reception for Onesimus; to bring about genuine reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus.

Paul--

- I. Expresses his appreciation for Philemon (verses 1-10), and
- II. Requests for Onesimus a Christian reception (verses 10-25).

BRIEF OUTLINE OF PHILEMON

Paul--

- I. Gives the salutation, 1-3;
- II. Expresses his appreciation for Philemon, 4-7;
- III. States his purpose in writing, 8,9;
- IV. Expresses his feelings about Onesimus, 10-16;
- V. Makes Known His request, 17-20;
- VI. Expresses confidence that Philemon would do even more than requested, 21;
- VII. Expresses confidence that he would shortly visit Philemon, 22;
- VIII. Sends greetings from those with him, 23, 24;
- IX. Expresses a closing prayer, 25.

The Salutation, verses 1-3.

1. Paul refers to the source of the letter.
 - (1) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus; and
 - (2) Timothy, our brother.
 - (3) Cf. Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1.
2. Paul specifies those addressed:
 - (1) To Philemon--
 - A. "Our beloved";
 - B. "Our fellow-worker."

2. Continued.

(2) To Apphia--

- A. "Our sister";
- B. Probably the wife of Philemon.

(3) To Archippus--

- A. "Our fellow-soldier";
- B. Probably the son of Philemon and Apphia.
- C. Consider: Col. 4:17.

(4) "To the church in thy house"---

- A. Note that a church met in the house of Philemon;
- B. Note also: Onesimus belonged to Philemon. Onesimus was of Colossae, Col. 4:9. Evidently, therefore, it was the church of Colossae which met in the house of Philemon.

3. Paul expresses the salutatory prayer.

- (1) Paul prays God's favor and its consequent peace to be upon those addressed.
- (2) This favor and peace would come from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Observations:

- (1) Philemon and his family were evidently people of considerable material means, and were using their means to the glory of God.
 - (2) These had become Christians and were anxious to extend the gospel message to others.
 - (3) Philemon, like Lydia, was generous, and each provided a meeting place for the church.
 - (4) We should always be concerned about God's favor, and its consequent peace.
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"I thank my God. . ." verses 4,5.

1. Paul mentions his thanks for Philemon.
2. He states that he "always" expressed his thanks.
3. He states that he always expressed his thanks to God.
4. He states that he expressed his thanks in his prayers.
5. Paul mentions that he was ever thankful for Philemon because of the love and faith which he had and which he had manifested--
 - (1) Toward the Lord, and
 - (2) Toward all the saints.
6. Observations:
 - (1) Paul always had and expressed appreciation for faithful Christians.
 - (2) Paul "always" mentioned many individuals and congregations in his prayers.
 - (3) Christians must be characterized by genuine brotherly love.

". . .that. . ." verse 6.

1. Paul mentions the "request" element of his prayers for Philemon.
2. He prayed that the "sharing" of Philemon's faith (his manifesting it) would promote the knowledge of all the good to be had in Christ.
3. Observations:
 - (1) The Christian's faith must be shared--by word and by deed.
 - (2) Philemon was practicing what the Lord taught. He was exerting proper Christian influence. Cf. Mt. 5:16.

". . .joy and comfort. . ." verse 7.

1. Paul mentions that he had found great joy and comfort in Philemon's love.
2. This was the case because Philemon's love was so wonderfully manifested to others.
3. And this was the case because Philemon's love had refreshed the hearts of the saints.

4. Observations:

- (1) The Christian's life is a life to share with others.
- (2) It must be a delight to God Himself when a Christian--
 - A. Manifests proper concern for all men;
 - B. Refreshes the hearts of the saints.

"...I rather beseech thee..." verses 8-10.

1. Paul mentions that his authority "in Christ" would enable him to command Philemon to do that which was proper.
2. He states however that the course of love dictated--
 - (1) That he not command, but
 - (2) that he rather "beseech" Philemon.
3. He, therefore, beseeches Philemon as--
 - (1) Paul the aged;
 - (2) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus.
4. He beseeches Philemon in behalf of a certain one--
 - (1) "My child,"
 - (2) "Whom I have begotten in my bonds";
 - (3) Even "Onesimus."

5. Observations:

- (1) Paul had authority to command. He was an apostle of the Christ, an ambassador of the King. What he did command and teach must be heeded.
- (2) Paul was cautious in the exercise of authority. It is easy for one to abuse authority. Authority inherently involves the responsibility to use that authority according to God's will.
- (3) Paul was loving and humble. He often used the word "beseech"---a term denoting love and humility.

5. Continued.

(4) Paul's great love, consideration, humanity (Christianity) is shown in his anxiety to plead the cause of another--to help someone else. Cf. Gal. 6:10.

(5) As Onesimus had Paul to plead his cause, we have the Christ Himself to plead in our behalf. Cf. 1 Jno. 2:1.

Onesimus, verses 10-14.

1. Paul beseeches Philemon in behalf of Onesimus.

2. He calls Onesimus his "child."

3. He mentions that he had converted Onesimus while he (Paul) was a prisoner.

4. He mentions that Onesimus was once "unprofitable" to Philemon, but that now he was "profitable" both--

(1) To Philemon, and

(2) To Paul.

NOTE: This is a play on the name "Onesimus," which means "helpful, profitable, able."

5. Paul states--

(1) That he was sending Onesimus back, and

(2) That in doing so he was sending his own heart...

6. He emphasizes that he wanted to keep Onesimus with him--

(1) That he (Onesimus) might minister to him (Paul) in behalf of Philemon, but

(2) That he would not do so without the consent of Philemon--in order that the "goodness" of Philemon would be of "free will" and not of "necessity."

7. Observations:

(1) Onesimus is another evidence of Paul's unceasing labors. Even while a prisoner Paul continued to teach, and his labors were rewarded. We must never cease to teach and to preach the gospel. And, our labors will not be in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

7. Continued.

- (2) Though Onesimus was his spiritual child, Onesimus did not call him "Father Paul." The Corinthian brethren did not call him "Farmer Paul" (1 Cor. 3:9) or "Builder Paul" (1 Cor. 3:10ff). The Thessalonian brethren did not call him "Nurse Paul" (1 Thess. 2:7).
- (3) Conversion changes one from the "unprofitable" side of God's ledger to the "profitable" side.
- (4) The case of Onesimus shows that conversion demands restitution (restoring, making things right) so far as is possible.
- (5) If Onesimus could minister to Paul in Philemon's behalf (verse 13), then there are at least some things which when one does through another he does himself. Cf. 2 Cor. 8:23; Lk. 10:33-37.
- (6) Paul was concerned about doing all things honorably. Cf. 2 Cor. 8:20,21; Rom. 12:17. He did not want "of necessity" help from Philemon, but only "free will" assistance. God has the same attitude toward our giving. Cf. 2 Cor. 9:7.
- (7) "Goodness" is not only an attribute, but a work or works. Philemon's ministering to Paul through Onesimus would have been Philemon's "goodness" (verse 14).

"...for a season..." verses 15, 16.

1. Paul mentions that "perhaps" Onesimus was "parted" from Philemon "for a season" in order that Philemon might have him "for ever"--no longer as a servant only, but as a beloved brother.
2. Upon his return, Onesimus would be a "servant," but much more than a servant.
3. He would be a "brother"--

3. Continued.

- (1) Peculiarly dear to Paul, and
- (2) Even dearer to Philemon--both
 - A. As a servant, and
 - B. As a fellow-Christian.

4. Observations:

- (1) This is a marvelous reference to God's providence, for if what Paul here says were not even possible, then there would be no point to the statement whatsoever. Hence, the passage shows--
 - A. The fact of God's providence;
 - B. Paul's belief in God's providence;
 - C. How God can and does work through men and their affairs.
- (2) Note the equalizing influence of the gospel of Christ. The same message goes to all. All stand alike before God. All Christians are "brethren."

"...receive him..." verse 17.

- 1. This is a key portion of the book: Paul requests a Christian reception for Onesimus.
- 2. Paul says to Philemon: "If therefore you regard me as a partner, receive him (Onesimus) as you would receive me."

3. Observations:

How Philemon received Onesimus would be clear evidence of his attitude toward Paul. Just so, our reactions to the Lord's instructions are clear evidence of our attitude toward Him. Cf. 1 Jno. 5:3; Jno. 14:15.

"...put that to mine account..." verse 18.

- 1. Paul allows the possibility that Onesimus had "wronged" Philemon, or "owed" him something.

2. The "if" construction (in the Greek New Testament) indicates the reality of the situation. The extent of the wrong would probably depend in great measure upon Philemon's attitude and reckoning--the loss and the cost which the "run away" and absence had occasioned.
3. Paul says: "if this be the case, charge it to me."
4. Paul emphasizes--
 - (1) Put that to mine account;
 - (2) I write it with mine own hand;
 - (3) I will repay it.
5. Observations:
 - (1) As Paul pleaded the cause of Onesimus, and was willing to take the debt of Onesimus--just so the Christ pleads our cause, and took our debt.
 - (2) Paul wanted complete and perfect fellowship between Philemon and Onesimus. This would require genuine repentance on the part of Onesimus, and forgiveness on the part of Philemon. We must be willing and anxious to correct our mistakes. We must be forgiving.

"...even thine own self..." verse 19.

1. Paul gives a gentle (yet pointed) reminder that Philemon himself owed himself to Paul.
 2. This refers to the fact that Paul had converted Philemon, probably while in Ephesus.
 3. Observation:

We are--in a special way--indebted to those who taught us the truth and led us to the Christ.
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"...let me have joy..." verse 20.

1. Paul again pleads that Philemon will do what he (Paul) beseeches him to do.
2. To see Philemon and Onesimus fully reconciled, as brethren in the Lord, would be an occasion of joy to Paul. To this end, Philemon would have to receive and forgive. Paul pleads: "Let me have joy of thee in the Lord."

3. Observation:

Christians must be anxious and glad "to receive and to forgive."

"...even beyond what I say," verse 21.

1. Paul expresses confidence that Philemon will do--
 - (1) Not only what has been requested, but
 - (2) Even more than has been requested.
2. This probably refers to Paul's confidence that Philemon would set Onesimus free.

3. Observations:

- (1) It is good to have and to express confidence in others.
- (2) It is good to be deserving of the confidence of others.
- (3) The gospel of the Christ abolishes slavery.

"...prepare me a lodging..." verse 22.

1. Paul asks Philemon to prepare for him a lodging.
2. He expresses confidence that he would soon see Philemon. Cf. Phil. 2:19, 23, 24.

3. To this end, Paul asks for the prayers of Philemon.

4. Observation:

There is power in prayer. If Paul needed the prayers of others, how much more do we need the prayers of others.

Epaphras, verse 23.

1. Paul sends the greetings of Epaphras.
2. He calls Epaphras "my fellow-prisoner in Christ."
3. Cf. Col. 1:7; Col. 4:12.

"...my fellow-workers.." verse 24.

1. Paul refers to Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. He calls these his "fellow-workers."
2. Cf. Col. 4:10, 14.

Concluding prayer, verse 25.

1. Paul prays the Lord's grace to be upon Philemon.
2. This is common in Paul's conclusions.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF PHILEMON

In the salutation Paul identifies himself as the writer, specifies those addressed, and expresses the salutatory prayer. Paul mentions the "thanksgiving element" in his prayers for Philemon, and then refers to the "request element." He refers to his great joy and comfort which he found in Philemon's love. Following the course dictated by love Paul besought Philemon in behalf of Onesimus. He explains in detail his feelings about and concern for Onesimus. He makes special reference to God's providence in connection with Onesimus, and pleads with Philemon to "receive him." Paul accepts to himself any indebtedness which Onesimus had to Philemon. He gently reminds Philemon of his (Philemon's) own spiritual indebtedness to him. He makes another strong appeal for Philemon to do as requested, expresses confidence that Philemon will do even more, and states that he expected to visit Philemon shortly. He sends greetings from Epaphras, makes particular mention of his "fellow-workers," and expresses a concluding prayer.

ADDITIONAL LESSONS FROM PHILEMON

1. The honorableness of Paul is clearly reflected. In Rom. 12:17 Paul enjoins: "Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men." In 2 Cor. 8:20, 21 he says: "...avoiding this, that any man should blame us in the matter of this bounty which is ministered by us: for we take thought for things honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." He desired to keep Onesimus with him, but would not do so without the consent of Philemon. Paul would not seek to exert undue pressure upon Philemon.
2. One of the great lessons set out in this book is the fact that repentance demands restitution (making things right) so far as is possible for things to be made right. Onesimus, a slave, had run away from Philemon, his master. He had learned the gospel, and had become a Christian. His genuine repentance would compel him to go home--to go back to his master and to make things right with him.
3. The book of Philemon makes reference to the Bible doctrine of the providence of God. Paul says: "For perhaps he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him for ever...." The statement is similar to that of Mordecai, recorded in Esther 4:14--"...and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
4. In the book of Philemon we learn something about how the gospel of Christ dealt with the problem of slavery (which practice was characteristic of the Roman Empire). The gospel did not demand immediately that all the slaves be set free. Such would have precipitated even greater persecution. It did set free. Such would have precipitated even greater persecution. It did set out the sacred principles for both masters and slaves which--when and where applied--would bring slavery to an end. Where men do unto others as they would have others do unto them there can be no slavery.
5. The man Philemon stands as a wonderful example (1) in Christian stewardship, (2) in concern for the church, (3) in brotherly love, and (4) in Christian influence. His wonderful love and faith were (1) toward the Lord Jesus, and

- (2) toward all the saints.
6. Paul wrote to Philemon, in behalf of Onesimus. As Onesimus had another (Paul) to plead his cause, just so we have another (the Christ) to plead our cause. John says: "And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 Jno. 2:1,2). The word "Advocate" is the translation of the Greek paraklatos, which means the one who is called to stand by our side, and to plead our cause--the Counsel for the Defense.
7. Philemon and Onesimus are exemplary in reconciliation. On the part of Onesimus reconciliation would demand sincere repentance. On the part of Philemon, reconciliation would demand genuine forgiveness. The very theme of the Bible is reconciliation--Reconciliation between God and man. God has worked out and has provided the sacred plan by which this reconciliation is possible. God is willing and anxious to forgive. And, He commands all men everywhere to "repent" (Acts 17:30). God has done His part; man must do his.
8. This letter teaches us much about genuine Christian love, compassion, and concern for others. Though Paul was in extremely difficult circumstances himself, he was still thinking of others, and was still working constantly in behalf of others. In a very special and very loving way he was anxious to help his friend and fellow-Christian, Onesimus.
9. Paul said to Philemon, about Onesimus: "But if he hath wronged thee at all, or oweth thee aught, put that to mine account; I Paul write it with mine own hand, I will repay it: that I say not unto thee that thou owest to me even thine own self besides" (Phile. 18,19). In a sense, Onesimus symbolizes all men. All men--because of their sins--have wronged the one to whom they belong. All men owe a debt to God which they cannot pay. Like Paul, our Lord said: "Put that debt on my account! I will take care of it." The Lord will take the debt of each and every one who will believe upon Him and obey His will. He will make possible complete reconciliation.

