

Lesson 1

Intro to Philemon 1:1-1:5

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Study Notes



*** Start the Recorder ***

Group Discussion – Reflection Questions from the Last Session:

- Testimonies: Take a moment to reflect on the Titus Ten study.
 - What did you get out of it?
 - What did it mean to you?
 - Did it change your worldview?
 - What was your favorite session? Why?

Introduction to Philemon: Good morning. Since Paul's letter to Philemon is so closely connected to his letter to the churches at Colossae (Colossians), of which we completed our study earlier this year, and as it is a single chapter book with just 25 verses, we elected to follow up Colossians with a brief study of just a few lessons in Philemon before moving on to our lengthier study of the Gospel of Matthew.

The Epistle to Philemon is a personal letter written by the Apostle Paul to a friend and fellow believer. The letter is Paul's shortest epistle and was written in connection with his letter to the Church at Colossae. Paul wrote both letters, Colossians and Philemon, during his first imprisonment at Rome. When his letter to the Colossians was couriered to Colossae, Paul sent his letter to Philemon along with it, as Philemon lived in Colossae and pastored a house church there.

Paul wrote the letter as an appeal to Philemon, a slave-owning Christian, to forgive, set free, and embrace Onesimus, his runaway slave, as a new brother in Christ. Runaway slaves in the Roman Empire often joined bands of criminals, and thus, it is possible that Onesimus had done just that and gotten himself thrown into prison where he may have come in contact with Paul. He may have been in Rome as a runaway and heard Paul was in prison and went to him for some reason, maybe to help him reconcile with Philemon. Or perhaps Paul already knew, or knew of, Onesimus as the slave of his friend Philemon. We just don't know.

In any case, Paul apparently had witnessed to Onesimus and led him to repentance and faith in Christ. Onesimus became a close companion of Paul, and Paul did not want to let him go. Still, Paul did the right thing and sent him back to his master, Philemon, but with this letter.

As we read and work through this letter, we will see just how expertly Paul crafts his appeal to release Onesimus. We will profit from studying Paul's example of how to speak to a brother "*as a brother*" (**1Ti 5:1**) in an encouraging way to *Do the Right Thing*. Paul could simply have commanded Philemon to release Onesimus, and no doubt, Philemon would have done so. But the appeal Paul writes is much more powerful than any command, and it accomplishes so much more than a command could have accomplished. Paul's letter is a master class in persuasion and Christian ethics.

Opening Prayer: _____.

Read Allowed: Philemon 1:1-25

Philemon 1:1 (NOTES)

- *“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus”* – Paul begins his letter with the statement that he is a prisoner. This has at least a double meaning.
 - First, Paul is in prison on account of his preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Second, Paul is Christ’s willing slave, and thus, metaphorically, *“a prisoner of Christ Jesus”*.
- *“Timothy, our brother”* – Paul’s mention of Timothy is likely because Philemon and Timothy knew each other as brothers in Christ (“our brother”). Timothy had ministered with Paul at Ephesus for several years, which is in Western Turkey about 200 km from Colossae. Moreover, Philemon came to Christ under Paul’s ministry, which probably happened at Ephesus.
- *“To Philemon our beloved [brother] and fellow worker”* – Paul uses “our” again, saying to anyone reading/hearing the letter that Paul and Timothy considered Philemon to be their brother in Christ. Moreover, the general tone indicates the letter is for public consumption. It is a personal letter, but not a private one, as we will see in the next verse (vs. 2).

- “beloved...and fellow worker” – Paul introduces Timothy as brother, but addresses Philemon with the additional honorifics of “beloved brother” and “fellow worker”. As Paul’s letter will be read aloud in the churches, he gives special honor to Philemon to save face, given the ostensible request he is about to make of Philemon.
- I have no doubt of Paul’s sincerity in every word he wrote – this is an inspired text of Scripture. But it should not be lost on us that Paul is preparing Philemon’s heart for the appeal and making the appeal public for all to hear and know. He is tactfully and rightfully *laying it on*.

Philemon 1:2 (NOTES)

- “*Apphia, our sister*” – A female name and probably the wife of Philemon, who is also a believer (“*our sister*”).
- “*Archippus, our fellow soldier*” – Probably their son, who had worked in the ministry alongside Paul.
- “*the church in your house*” – In Philemon’s house. Philemon was very likely the pastor of the church that met in his home.
- “*and to Apphia...and to Archippus...and to the church in your house*” – The letter is ostensibly written to Philemon, but ultimately to the church of which Philemon is a member and possible pastor. Before Paul even makes his case concerning the release of Onesimus, he decides in advance to put the matter before the whole church. This could be:

- Because Paul was following Matthew 18, had already sent someone in private, followed by two or three witnesses, and the unforgiving Philemon was being taken before the church.
 - This seems less likely than the notion that there may have been other slave-masters in the congregation who needed to hear the message of Paul's letter.
 - Even more likely was that Paul wanted to give Philemon an opportunity for restoration in the eyes of the church and to train the church in the arts of persuasion and ethics. The pressure is on.
- Imagine if the Apostle Paul had written requesting that Pastor Dustin forgive Pastor Brice about something and had it read aloud in the Sunday morning service, maybe during the announcements. Might not Pastor Dustin had been more inclined to forgive him? It would seem so.
- What if Paul wrote to the church and asked *you* to forgive someone? Well, as it turns out, Paul, David, other biblical writers, and Jesus Himself have written just such commands and has had them read in all the churches down through the ages that you and I are to forgive our repentant sinners and debtors.
- **Luke 17:3-4** *"If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, I repent, forgive him."*
- **Matt 6:12** *"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."*

- **Matt 6:14-15** *“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”*
- **Eph 4:32** *“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

EXCURSUS: Passages Teaching Repentance as a Prerequisite to God's Forgiveness:

- In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, he directly links repentance with the forgiveness of sins.
 - **Acts 2:38** *“Peter said to them, Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*
- Peter also emphasizes repentance as necessary for sins to be wiped away.
 - **Acts 3:19** *“Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”*
- Confession of sin is an acknowledgement of one's sin and is a necessary component of repentance. The sinner who refuses to acknowledge his sin remains unforgiven.

- **Ps 32:5** *"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD ; and You forgave the guilt of my sin."*
- For believers, confession of sins is tied to God's faithfulness and righteousness to forgive and cleanse us.
 - **1Jo 1:9** *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
- Scripture encourages believers to forgive each other, mirroring God's forgiveness in Christ, which requires confession and repentance.
 - **Eph 4:32** *"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."*
- Now, here's the real question. Seeing how God has written and had read in the churches that we as believers are to forgive, is there anyone in your life who has repented and asked for your forgiveness, that you have not yet released in your heart and forgiven? Are you refusing to reconcile with anyone?
- Are you the one who needs to confess and repent and seek forgiveness from someone else? Are you the one who needs to take the first step in reaching out, whether you are the offending party or the offended party? Is God convicting you of someone's name right now? *"Go and be reconciled."* **Matt 5:24**

Closing Challenge: *Note: The passage may challenge us to start or stop doing something, increase or decrease something we're doing, or change something. The following are merely examples. Draw your own from the text.*

- This passage is about _____. As men of God, it challenges us to:
 - o Start doing something. (e.g. – praying with your wife)
 - o Stop doing something. (e.g. – skipping church for activities)
 - o Do more of something. (e.g. – opening up to a trusted friend)
 - o Do less of something. (e.g. – making decisions without input)
 - o Do something differently. (e.g. – disagreeing with gentleness)

Questions or Comments?

Small Groups