

BOOK OF PHILEMON - VERSES 1-7

Introduction:

*This very short letter, that Paul wrote in his own hand, contains only 25 verses. It was written to one of the many converts Paul had led to Jesus Christ - his good friend Philemon, at the city of Colosse.

*The book of Philemon is one of the four "prison epistles", along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Paul wrote these epistles during his first Roman imprisonment in approximately AD 60-61.

*Before the New Testament epistles were complete, God had used law, history, poetry and prophecy of the Old Testament scriptures as a method to guide His people in life.

*There are different kinds of epistles: Some were directed at churches and some were directed to groups or certain individuals. This letter to Philemon was recognized as a personal letter, straight from the Apostle Paul's heart and his love for the brethren.

*Reading this epistle is like looking over the shoulder of Philemon and reading his personal mail. What is interesting is the fact that the Spirit of God had included this little letter in the Holy Scriptures as an inspiration from God to man.

*This epistle is the story of three main characters and their interactions - Philemon, Onesimus and Apostle Paul. This letter was sent at the same time that Tychicus carried Paul's letter to the Colossians.

*Philemon was a very wealthy man in Colosse and he owned slaves. He had come to the saving faith in Christ while in Ephesus, where Paul was speaking about the grace message. For two years people were coming to hear him from all over the area.

*One of Philemon's slaves, Onesimus, had run away from his master and became a fugitive. He had reached Rome during the time that Paul was imprisoned there. Onesimus met Paul in Rome and was led to Christ through Paul's ministry.

*In the days that followed, a mutual bond of love developed between Onesimus and Paul. Onesimus became a valued helper to Paul. They both agreed that the proper thing to do was for Onesimus to return to his master, Philemon, and make right the wrongs of the past.

*So Paul writes this personal letter to Philemon, interceding for Onesimus and presenting strong reasons why he should be graciously restored to his master's favor.

*Paul implores Philemon to receive Onesimus, not as a servant or slave, but as a brother beloved. This is about the master and the servant being in a new relationship with Christ in their lives. Paul wants them to teach brotherly love and show how it works.

Colossians 4:1 - Masters, give unto *your* servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

Philemon - Verse 1 - Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,

1. There is no doubt that Paul wrote this letter to Philemon. In this first verse, Paul identifies himself and again in verse 9 and 19.
2. Paul introduces himself as a "prisoner" rather than as an apostle. When Paul wrote to the churches, he gave his official title, "an apostle of Jesus Christ".

*But here, Paul does not defend his apostleship. This is a personal letter to a personal friend.

3. When Paul says he is "a prisoner of Jesus Christ", Paul is saying that he does not look on himself as a prisoner of the Roman Empire. Paul's statement here means he is a prisoner because of being a witness for Christ, by preaching the mystery message of Christ.
4. Timothy is mentioned here with Paul being in the Roman prison. Paul recognizes Timothy as a faithful dedicated follower.
5. The name "Philemon" means "affectionate" and Paul thought highly of him, calling him his dearly beloved and fellow laborer in the Lord.

Philemon - Verse 2 - And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:

1. Philemon was a wealthy landowner in Colosse and we know he hosted the church there in his home. Paul mentions a person named Apphia, which most scholars agree that she was Philemon's wife.
2. Archippus we assume is their son. Some believe he eventually became the pastor of the church in Colosse.
Colossians 4:17 - And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.
*Paul calls him "our fellow soldier". This would not be a soldier in the Roman army, but a soldier in the army of Jesus Christ.
3. The local church in Paul's day did not meet in beautiful buildings or temples, but they met in homes. It was there they gathered for worship, prayer, and fellowship and were all one in Christ Jesus.

Philemon - Verse 3 - Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. This was Paul's salutation in most of his epistles. It shows a great connection between God's blessing to the believers in grace and peace.
2. God's grace: this includes all the undeserved favor which God showers on His people. Then comes associated with grace - Peace. Peace gives us a settled confidence and calm to stabilize our lives that comes from being right with God.

PAUL'S THANKSGIVING & PRAYER FOR PHILEMON
Verses 4-7

Philemon - Verse 4 - I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,

1. Whenever Paul prayed for Philemon, he thanked God for his dedication and faithfulness as a brother in Christ.
2. The thought here is that every time Paul prayed, he prayed for his good friend and trusted brother in Christ-Philemon.

Philemon - Verse 5 - Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

1. We see two qualities in Philemon's character that gave Paul great joy - his love and the faith which he had toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.
2. By commending Philemon's love and faith in his fellowship with the believers who served God, Paul showed that he had the fruit of compassion as well.
3. Paul expressed this similar thanks in several of his other letters.

Ephesians 1:15-16 - Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Eph. 1:16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

Colossians 1:4-5 - Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints, Col. 1:5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

II Thessalonians 1:3 - We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4. Here Paul lays the groundwork for a specific expression of Christian love: forgiving his runaway slave, Onesimus, and to accept him as a brother in Christ.

Philippians 1:9 - And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;

Philemon - Verse 6 - That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

1. The previous two verses expressed Paul's thanks to Philemon. This verse makes known the nature of Paul's prayer to him.
2. The sharing (communication) of your faith means the practical kindness which Philemon showed to others. Paul prayed that Philemon's life of kindness and generosity would lead many to understand that all good deeds come from Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:13 - For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

3. Every good thing which is in you in your life shows the love of God is manifest and real.

I Thessalonians 5:18 - In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

4. We communicate our faith by our words and our actions. By doing this, it shows the love and kindness to one that might have done you wrong.

Colossians 3:12-14 - Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Col. 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do ye*. Col. 3:14 And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

Philemon - Verse 7 - For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

1. Paul had great joy and comfort in his love for Philemon and the other believers at Colosse. It had been a great privilege for Paul to lead Philemon to the Lord when he was in Ephesus. But, now how rewarding it was that Philemon's faith was going well.
2. The expression "bowels of the saints" implies that our inner parts, particularly from the heart, were being greatly refreshed by this beloved brother - especially by his love.
3. Our actions affect others and we sometimes never know how our influence will do good to one needing Christ in their lives. Being kind and compassionate to one another is echoed throughout this letter by Paul - having love for all the saints.

In Closing:

Prayer is our line of communication that connects us to our Heavenly Father, as a child of God. We get strength and direction in our life by praying.

Some people say they do not know what to pray about, so here are some suggestions to improve your prayer life.

- *Pray for safety
- *Pray for other people
- *Pray for spiritual wisdom
- *Pray when we are thankful

- *Pray when we need to confess a sin
- *Pray when we are in danger
- *Pray when you are tempted
- *Pray when we are sick

*These are just a few things we can pray for and let God be in control in answering our prayers.

Next Week - We will see in the rest of this letter Paul's plea for Philemon to show grace and love for his run-away slave, Onesimus, as he returns back to Colosse.