

Philemon

God Plays the Long Game

WAITING on God can be MORE Tiring than WORKING for God

SHORTEST Letter of Paul > God Plays the Long Game

Colossians ch 4 Paul says that the courier Tychicus will “tell you all about my activities.” And he’ll have a traveling companion: “Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you” Colossians 4:7,9

2 Men carried 2 Letters of Paul – maybe 4? Laodicea & Ephesians too?

Over 1000 miles Rome to Colossae > Land and Sea > Difficult Journey

Imagine 1st Read Letter from Paul to Colossians to Gathered Church

Then Letter for MAN whose House Church met in PHILEMON....

PHILEMON heard Gospel thru Paul > Likely in EPHESUS – 100 mi W.

Philemon > Wealthy, Homeowner > OWNED at Least One SLAVE

SLAVE had COMMON Name ‘USEFUL’ – Gk. ONESIMUS

Onesimus RAN Away from Master > Traveled 1000 mi. ROME

Looking for SAFETY of Anonymity > Living in FEAR in SHADOWS

MET Paul the Prisoner > Where you FROM? Colossae

“I know a couple people in Colossae” – Master Named PHILEMON

I know HIM – I Introduced HIM to JESUS TOO!

Saving POWER of God force behind LETTER Paul wrote to Philemon

1. Prayer v. 4 “I thank my God always when I remember you”
2. Petition v. 9 “for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you”
3. Promise v. 18 “charge that to my account...I will repay it”

v. 1 To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

PHILEMON = Affectionate > Wife: Apphia / Son: Archippus (pastor?)

3rd C 1st EVIDENCE of Church BUILDING, 8 Ref NT – House Churches

1. Prayer v. 4 “I thank my God always when I remember you”

vs. 4-7 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

HEAD Swollen with ALL the PRAISE! No MENTION of Onesimus YET

TODAY: How can Philemon be REAL Xtian and OWN Slaves? –
Entire ECONOMY built on Slaves > MACHINES of Ancient World
1/3 Roman Empire SLAVES – ALL Colors, Cultures, Citizenships

Slavery > near-constant throughout human history

MORE Slaves in World TODAY than ever before in HISTORY!

2. Petition v. 9 “for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you”

5 Strong Appeals: a) Philemon man brought BLESSING to Others

v. 5 “love toward all the saints” / v. 6 EVERY Good Thing in You

v. 7 “the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you”

v. 7 You REFRESH All Saints > v. 20 NOW Refresh MY Heart

b) LOVE - vs. 8,9 “Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you”

v. 1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother

Not NORMAL Opening > Dozen other Letters > APOSTLE

Paul PRISONER of X > 5 X’s Paul says he is PRISONER: OLD MAN

Appeal on the BASIS of Love > love-based Rhetorical Masterpiece

Philemon probably has ROOT of BITTERNESS growing UP to an OAK TREE

ONESIMUS was NOT Useful to Philemon > He RAN Away from Owner

Runaway SLAVES were Tortured / CRUCIFIED > Social ORDER!

Most Xtians 1st C > Believe Runaway Slaves PUNISHED – Need Them

IF all RAN > Like POWER Blackout / Internet Shut-Down TODAY

Big Step for Onesimus “Go Back!” – to Death? – Paul the PRISONER!

Philemon you LOVE ALL the Saints = Onesimus too

Paul writes > Philemon will Gladly Comply of his own Accord

c) Conversion of Onesimus - v. 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

I COULD use my AUTHORITY > Pull RANK > OLD Man in PRISON

NO PRESSURE Let me tell you about MY SON...last word in vs. 10

SENTENCE in Greek > LAST Word in vs. 10 ONESIMUS...Ta Da...!

Maybe at THAT Moment Onesimus STEPPED INTO the Room?!

v. 12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.

My HEART: I COULD have KEPT Him - To DO YOUR Work for Me

Philemon's a Christian, and Paul says, “Your slave become Xtian too”

“I could tell you what you should do, but I'll let you decide on your own”

Wife to Husband: “If you want to go out & watch the game tonight with all of your friends & leave me alone with the kids, that's fine. Whatever you decide, okay?”

Christian CONVERSION did NOT Change Position in ROMAN LAW

Does have NEW Standing in COURT of Living God > ACQUITTED

All Charges DROPPED – DEBT of Sin Paid in FULL by Jesus on Cross

Paul: “I want my heart refreshed in Christ > My 2 SONS should LOVE

d) VALUE of Onesimus to God's Kingdom

v. 11(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) WORD Play – ONESIMUS > Greek for USEFUL

Philemon gets MORE than Bondservant > Now Beloved Brother

You want See people in your church Come to Faith? HERE is One!

v. 13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.

Letter REF. by BOTH Sides of Slavery Issue: CONTINUE & CLOSE

Paul NOT Directly Condemn Slavery > Preaches New Family in X

Frontal Attack on Institution > Aroused WRATH of Roman Empire

Direct Challenge Xtian Minority BRANDED Anti-Social

SPIRIT of Letter points to END of Slavery thru BROTHERHOOD

e) PROVIDENCE of God – Random Event NOT Luck – God’s WILL

vs. 15, 16 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So FILLED w LOVE / Loyalty > Sending HIM is Sending ME

v. 15 NOW Receive him BACK FOREVER > BELOVED BROTHER

To BOTH of Us – Flesh and Spirit IN the LORD > Eternal Life in Jesus

CONFIDENCE that he will DO the RIGHT Thing > NOW Brother!

Personal STRATEGY of Paul as PASTOR > WISE and CAREFUL

3. Promise v. 18 “charge that to my account...I will repay it”

vs. 17-19 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.

If Onesimus STOLE > Paul effectively says, “Put it on my tab.

You happen to owe your very life to me, Philemon!

What he STOLE, I will PAY >> Of course you OWE me ALL

Gospel ANALOGY: RECEIVE Him as you Would Receive ME

1. All Sinners on the Run – Problems too Deep and Complicated for us to Solve
2. Someone PAID the Price of our Debts
3. ADVOCATE Works for our Restoration
4. Reconciliation with our Master

v. 20 Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

Refresh: Bring ME Joy in the LORD > GOSPEL Application – Debt Paid

How is PAUL Functioning? > Like Jesus > Like the CROSS

Arm on Philemon / Arm on Onesimus > PULLS Together

Onesimus RISKS Life to Come Back – Gives up FREEDOM as FUGITIVE

Live forever in SHADOWS and Fear? Now LIGHT in Freedom!?

Philemon loses POWER – Dignity? Respect? What a WIMP? Not a MAN?

At LEAST Blind in ONE EYE > Cut OFF a HAND > Public Whipping

How DO you LIVE Out the GOSPEL? YOUR Power & Position? Gain!

ABSORB Strife – Achieve Reconciliation – FIGHTING Home? Work?

Unresolved CONFLICT – DIE to your RIGHTS! >> We HOLD Back

“I WILL Forgive when you Apologize, Pay Me Back, Restore My Honor”

PAUL wrote Reconcile BEFORE Any Forgiveness Words SPOKEN!

vs. 21,22 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

Incentive > “I’ll pass thru your neck of the woods! Set up Guest Room

YOU WILL do the Right Thing > Even MORE than I SAY

Get the GUEST Room Ready > thru Your PRAYERS I am Coming

vs. 23,24 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

11 Names in Short Letter > Wanted P. KNOW Lots of People Watching!

COVENANT with Respected WITNESSES > Goober says Hey!

Paul the Apostle was Master of MITIGATED Arm-Twisting

v. 24 “Mark” > Paul & Barnabas had “sharp disagreement” Acts 15:39

Paul didn’t want Mark to come along > Deep Relational Damage

Paul DID what he Asks Onesimus to DO > Forgive and RESTORE

Christians of goodwill can have painful separation & unresolved conflict.

End of the story hasn’t yet been written > God plays the long game

HOW does Jesus and Salvation IMPACT how we Actually LIVE?

Does GOSPEL have DIRECT Bearing on SOCIETY and LIVES

v. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Brings Christ into GODLESS Social Structure of Roman SLAVERY

All Participants of UNJUST System come Under Authority of Lord Jesus

When in Hands of JESUS we regain our USEFULLNESS

Transformation will come from BOTTOM Up > from HEART Outward

Most Xtians 21st C > Believe PAUL should have CONDEMNED Slavery

CIVIL War > SLAVE Holders in American South read PHILEMON

Is Paul COWARDLY? Did NOT Press for Immediate EMANCIPATION

Wrong about SLAVES – Women – Children – Homosexuals!

Reconciliation: Connecting Line btw CROSS and Masters/Slaves

Philemon: Practice GOSPEL thru RESTORATION > Unconditional Love

Paul gives Gospel PRINCIPLE > Calls Believer to Make Right Decision

Paul NOT Force His AUTHORITY > Gives P. the RESPONSIBILITY

What BEARING does GOSPEL have on Situation?

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Colossians 3.11

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3.28

End Roe v. Wade > LAW did NOT Change Hearts > REVEALED them

Republican Politicians ‘Pro Life’ – Losing Votes > Support Baby Killing

Want to make ABORTION Illegal > Better make it UNTHINKABLE

Battle Not at Ballot Box – Hearts & Minds think Murder Solves Anything

“A lie can travel around the world and back again while the truth is lacing up its boots.”—Mark Twain.

Kingdom of God spread CITIZENS – You and Me who Follow JESUS
 Stand for Truth – Practice Love, Forgiveness – Explain the Scriptures
 TEACH Children – Want PRAYER in School – Do we Pray at HOME?

New Testament > Slavery BOTH Physical and Spiritual Reality

Undermines slavery as Physical reality and Underlines as Spiritual Reality

Paul undermines FOUNDATION of physical slavery.

“Don’t take him back as just slave...but as a useful brother in Christ”

Romans 6: “You were once slaves to sin and ever-increasing wickedness. God broke those chains asunder, and now you’re slaves of Christ and ever-increasing righteousness.

Bob Dylan still sings —“Gotta Serve Somebody”?

You’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed

You’re gonna have to serve somebody

Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord

But you’re gonna have to serve somebody

Philemon ¹Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ²and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. ⁷For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you. ⁸Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you, I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus ¹⁰I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹²I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—

especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. ¹⁸If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²²At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you. ²³Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.