

Philemon

Background

- Prisoner (1, 9)
- With Paul:
 - Timothy (1)
 - Mentioned in Acts 16:1, 17:14 – 15, 18:5, 19:22, 20:4, Romans 16:21, 1 Corinthians 4:17, 16:10, 2 Corinthians 1:1 1:19, Philippians 1:1, 2:19, Colossians 1:1, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 3:2, 3:6, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Timothy 1:2, 1:18, 6:20, 2 Timothy 1:2, Hebrews 13:23
 - The mentions of Timothy in which Paul was a prisoner were Philippians and Colossians, so this probably was written at the same time.
 - Epaphras (23), also in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12
 - Mark (24), also in Acts 12:12, 12:25, 15:37, 15:39, 2 Timothy 4:11
 - Aristarchus (24), also in Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2, Colossians 4:10
 - Demas (24), also in Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:10
 - Luke (24), also in Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11
- Addressed to:
 - Philemon (1), only here
 - Apphia (2), only here
 - Archippus (2), also in Colossians 4:17
 - Because Archippus is reminded to fulfill the service he had received from the Lord in the letter to the church at Colossae, the other addressees are likely in the same location.
- Special mention, Onesimus (10), also in Colossians 4:9, one of the carriers of the letter to Colossae.

Exposition

- (3) Grace and peace, as in almost all letters, a reminder of the objectives: taking on the gracious nature of God and being at peace (with God, others, and self). The same sentiment is in the last verse (25). Probably intentionally, Paul is a little vague. The grace could be the character of Jesus to which we respond, or the transformation of our spirits, or, probably, both.
- (4 – 7) In keeping with his objective of encouragement, Paul begins most letters with a reminder that the recipients are in his prayers daily (Romans 1:9 – 12, 1 Corinthians 1:4 – 9, Ephesians 1:15 – 23, Philippians 1:3 – 11, Colossians 1:3 – 12, 2 Timothy 1:3 – 5).
 - In response to hearing of their love and faith toward Jesus (easy).
 - In response to hearing of their love toward all the saints (not so easy).
 - The hearts of all the saints have been refreshed in hearing of the same.
 - The objective of Paul's prayer: that their evangelism be effective through acknowledgment of every good thing that is in us (the Spirit)
 - Application: The faith and love of each group of Christians should be known and remarked upon by the other groups.
- (8 – 16) Paul's objective
 - A contrast is made between:
 - Command, appeal (NKJV, RSV)
 - Enjoin, beseech (ASV)
 - Tell, ask (CEV)

Philemon

- Order, appeal (NASB, NIV)
- The first word is not so strong as “command.” Paul does not connect his apostleship to the “order,” although some translations insert that idea. CEV seems to have come the closest by using more generic words. Paul’s description of their relationship as “partners” (19) leads the same direction.
- Paul’s appeal is for Philemon to send Onesimus back for the purpose of serving Paul while he is in prison (13). An essential part of a good deed is that it is voluntary (14).
- Details of the relationships of Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon
 - Paul taught Onesimus the gospel during Paul’s imprisonment (10).
 - Onesimus was Philemon’s slave (16)
 - Onesimus had become “unprofitable” (11) to Philemon, so the assumption is made that Onesimus had run away.
 - Paul had had a big impact on Philemon in the past (19).
- Advice to Christian slaves: Ephesians 6:5 – 8, Colossians 3:22 – 24, 1 Timothy 6:1 – 2, Titus 2:9 – 10, 1 Peter 2:18 – 20
- Advice to Christian masters: Ephesians 6:9, Colossians 4:1
- Paul speculates that the meeting of a runaway slave and the gospel may not have been entirely by chance (15).
- Application: Christians should provide opportunities for others to grow.
- (17 – 22) Cleaning up the details of a difficult situation
 - Paul recognized that the circumstances of Onesimus’ departure may have incurred some property loss, and certainly during the absence. This debt needed to be acknowledged and accounted (18).
 - Paul appeals to Philemon emotionally, as the one who had taught him the gospel (19 - 21)
 - Paul expresses confidence in Philemon’s prayers (22).
 - Application: Life is messy. We need to clear away the obstacles to doing the right thing.