

# ***The Book of Philemon***

## **Short but Practical / tablets of heart / Someone else's mail**

A short little letter with a powerful, practical, punch. A message that will write on the tablets of our heart. In this study we are going to read someone else's mail. This letter was probably never intended to be distributed publicly. All of Paul's letters were to exhort churches and leaders, and done knowing that they would be distributed publicly.

## **Personal / relationships / difficulties / Redemption works of Christ**

Philemon is a personal letter, written about a personal friend, about a personal problem. Paul never knew that 2000 years later we would not only be reading his mail, but studying it. Studying it on how to deal with relationships, deal with difficulties, and the redeemed work of Jesus Christ. But God knew, and God made sure that it made its way to the church, and us today, for we will see patterns that all of us are to follow.

## **62AD / Paul in Prison / House Arrest**

This is written approximately 62AD, Paul is imprisoned; this was his first Roman imprisonment, which was more like a house arrest. Paul could come and go as he desired in the city, but at all times he would be chained to a Roman Soldier.

## **Onesimus gets Saved / Philemon gets Saved**

Somewhere, somehow, Paul leads a runaway slave named Onesimus to the Lord. The amazing thing is that Paul had lead his master to the Lord, some 900 miles away in Colosse. So Onesimus, goes on the run, only to run into his master's friend, who happens to be the greatest evangelist of the day.

## **True Freedom / Setting things right**

The Divine appointment resulted in Onesimus giving his life to Jesus Christ, and finding true freedom, a freedom that the world can not give, nor ever take away. Now Paul is sending Onesimus back to his master in Colosse, to set things right. But to help ease the return, he writes this letter from his heart to his old friend Philemon.

Theme for the Book of Philemon:

*(Philemon 1:17 NKJV) If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.*

Outline For this Book

Introduction: 1-3

The Testimony of Philemon: 4-7

The Testimony of Paul: 8-10

The Testimony of Onesimus: 11-16

The Testimony of Christ: 17-19

Farewell: 20-25

## **Introduction: 1-3**

**(Philemon 1:1 NKJV) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer,**

## **prisoner of Jesus Christ / Do we realize our positions**

Instead of the "Apostle of Jesus Christ", he starts off with a "prisoner of Jesus Christ". But notice he is not a prisoner of Rome, or Caesar, but of Jesus Christ. Paul is saying Jesus has me right where He wants me. Do we realize this, that whatever position or situation we are in, God has us right where he wants us. That if we feel chained by circumstances, or imprisoned in a situation, that we are in this position because Jesus Christ is orchestrating and directing all things in my life.

### **Paul Upbeat – not a victim – sovereign hand of God**

Paul was able to be so upbeat, and used so powerfully because he had this understanding that whatever and wherever he was, he wasn't a victim, but that the sovereign hand of God was at work – Paul a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

### **Paul adds Timothy**

Paul adds Timothy to his introduction, for Paul later in this letter will refer to himself as the aged, so Paul knows that either through age or circumstance, he was going to be with the Lord soon, and he wanted to prepare the people to receive the ministry of Timothy, as he would take over the lead for Paul. Leaders, you need to be raising up leaders, when you see that God's hand is upon them, then put your support behind them so the people will receive his/her ministry.

### **(Philemon 1:2 NKJV) to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:**

*Apphia, Archippus* - these two are possibly Philemon's wife and son.

### **House Church / Book of Revelation**

*to the church in your house* – Parents, do you want your children and family on-fire for Jesus Christ? Then turn your house into a church. Teach the word there, have times of worship, let prayers be lifted up from your home, have communion as a family. Your house is your church. You teens you can be youth pastors to your little brothers and sisters by ministering the things you have learned in your studies, to them.

Philemon opened his home to invite others in, we can all do that. Invite your neighbors, co-workers over for coffee or dinner, and minister the love of Christ to them. Do this and watch you and your family's life changed. In Revelation, the seven churches, each church had an angel over them, and Jesus stood in the midst of the churches. Turn your house into a church, and the same will be true for you.

### **(Philemon 1:3 NKJV) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

### **interface with the world**

Paul's interface with the world, grace and peace. Everywhere and everybody Paul met, he wanted to impart to them the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Testimony of Philemon: 4-7**

**(Philemon 1:4 NKJV) I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,**  
**(Philemon 1:5 NKJV) hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,**

### **preventative medicine / Enemy sure to attack**

Big discussion on Medicare reform this week. But here is some preventative medicine right here. Pray for each other; and notice Paul is praying for them while they are doing well. They have love and faith, things are going well in their life. Philemon is well off financially (for he has servants), he has a family, he has the love of Christ in his life, he is loving the saints, and he has a home church. Philemon needs prayers, because you can be sure that the enemy is not pleased and wants to disrupt all the blessings that are going on.

Paul prays for him while he is doing well, so he may continue to do well. We have a tendency to pray for those who aren't do so well. We pray for people who are ill, or who are struggling with sin, depressed or discouraged. We should do that, but we should take Paul's example here and pray for each other always, so that others who are doing well, will continue to do well.

**(Philemon 1:6 NKJV) that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.**

**(Philemon 1:7 NKJV) For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.**

#### **the furtherance of the gospel**

Paul prays that Philemon will be able to communicate the faith even greater, that the furtherance of the gospel will go even deeper than he has taken thus far.

#### **Philemon was a Refreshment**

*the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.* – what a testimony, he was refreshment to the other believers. Verse 5 tells us he had love and faith towards all the saints.

#### **Are You / Conversations / how can I bless the Church**

Are you a refreshment to others? When people leave your presence, are they refreshed or more drained. Have you encouraged them or discouraged them? When people would be around Philemon, come to his house, they would be refreshed, encouraged in their heart. Sadly however, there are people who everything is about them, or for them. Every conversation is about what is going on in their life, their trials or struggles, they never have an ear to hear what is going on in others lives. They tell of their problems, every detail of it, or complain about every detail, and when they leave, the other person is just drained, zapped of energy. They look at the church as only what can the church do for me, how can the church and the people in it bless me, they never look at how can I bless the church, and people of this church.

#### **Share Burdens / Comfort one another / Not always about you**

Now, we are to share one another's burdens, the church is a place where the afflicted can be comforted, but everyone should equally be saying, how can I comfort the afflicted, how can I refresh them, let me remember it isn't always about me.

#### **Be like Philemon / J-O-Y**

Do you want joy in your life, do you desire to be like a Philemon? Then take the biblical example shown here for joy:

*(Philemon 1:5 NKJV) hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,*

J-O-Y: Jesus first, others second, and yourself third, and you will begin to experience joy in your life. Your joy will come through the refreshing of others. Continually ask yourself, how can I bless someone else today. My friend Mark always answers the phone at his ministry, "hello this is Mark, how may I bless you?". All I can say about Mark, is he does have a life of joy.

What a testimony of Philemon, he refreshed the hearts of the saints.

#### **The Testimony of Paul: 8-10**

**(Philemon 1:8 NKJV) Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting,**

**(Philemon 1:9 NKJV) yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you; being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ;**

#### **Example / not lording over / Let HS work**

Here is Paul giving us more practical examples in dealing with relationships; notice he doesn't lord over Philemon, he doesn't pull rank. Paul doesn't say I am number one apostle, instead he talks as a brother. Paul lets Philemon make his own decision. Paul allows God to work on Philemon's heart. You see if we take this example, if we don't tell people what they must do, if we let them make their own decisions lead by the Holy Spirit after seeking the Lord in prayer,

then their decision will stand the attacks of the enemy, and keep unity and peace among the brethren.

#### **Philemon not forced / no division**

If Paul said Philemon, you must do this, then Philemon may have held resentment towards Paul for being forced into something. Also, if Philemon suffered a financial set-back, or some type of hardship due to Paul saying you must do this, then that would have caused a division between the two of them.

#### **If Lord works it out – it will withstand Satan / Wrong decisions – we still trust God**

Rather Paul makes a request, and trusts the Lord will work it out. Anything the Lord works into us, will stand the attacks of the enemy. If Philemon or ourselves makes the wrong decision, we were in the flesh, then we again have to trust that God will still work all things together for good.

Now don't confuse me, God's word is final, and so is the Law of this land, and for the kids – the law of the Home is final. But areas like these, we have to trust the Lord and let go, and let God.

**(Philemon 1:10 NKJV) I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,**

#### **Paul's Appeal / Slaves / Paul's heart / The Undesirable**

Look at Paul's heart here, *I appeal to you for my son Onesimus*, he goes to bat for a slave. What an example for us. In those days that was unheard of, slaves were common property, used or abused as the owner chose. We read Paul's epistles and many times we see him being very direct and challenging when it comes to sin, but here we see his compassion, and his soft side. It is situations like these here in our lives that show the difference between a Bible Quoter, and a Bible Liver.

We see him going to bat, risking reputation and all to help the so-called undesirable of that day. Are we like Paul, will we take risks, get dirty, for the so-called undesirable of our day. The great apostle, preaching to Kings, and ministering to the homeless and runaways. Ohh that we would all be like Paul, that we would take his example and reach-out to those that have no one that nobody cares about.

#### **The Testimony of Onesimus: 11-16**

**(Philemon 1:11 NKJV) who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.**

#### **Unprofitable / But God / broken vessels – to vessels of honor**

Onesimus means profitable, but he became unprofitable to Philemon when he ran away. But God, praise the Lord for the But God, in the Bible, for God can take a wasted, broken, and unprofitable life, and turn it back into something profitable, something that will bless people, and bless God, and vessel of honor.

**(Philemon 1:12 NKJV) I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart,**

#### **he must pay restitution / New life – old debts**

Notice here, Paul tells Onesimus that he must fix what is wrong, he must do what is right, he must pay restitution. Being saved wipes out the debt of our sin, but it doesn't wipe out debts to society. A new life doesn't release us from old debts.

#### **We have obligation / Christians must repay**

We have an obligation to pay old debts. Onesimus ripped off Philemon by running away, he robbed Philemon of earnings. We as Christians must pay our credit debt, repay our friends and family,

pay the child-support, pay our car insurance. A lot of folks reject the gospel because they have been ripped off by Christians.

### **Zacchaeus is a great example**

Zacchaeus is a great example of repaying old debts. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, they were shady characters, they were known for ripping off the taxpayers, but when Zacchaeus met Jesus, he knew he had to set things right with those whom he owed a debt to. But he, like Onesimus, did it willing, for the Spirit of God was at work.

*(Luke 19:7 NKJV) But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."*

*(Luke 19:8 NKJV) Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."*

*(Luke 19:9 NKJV) And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;*

### **Breaking the Law**

If you break the law, you have to pay your sentence. You can't circumnavigate the laws because you say well I confessed to God and repented, therefore I don't have to confess to man. Wrong, getting saved doesn't release you from paying your debts. You have to do whatever you can to make things right.

It truly comes down to a trust thing. Lord I trust you that if I do what is right, you will bless me in the end. You will take care of all things.

**(Philemon 1:12 NKJV) I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart,**

**(Philemon 1:13 NKJV) whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.**

**(Philemon 1:14 NKJV) But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.**

### **I'd love to keep him**

Paul said I would love to keep him, but I can't, for he is yours, he is your slave. Yes he has been a blessing to me, yes he has and can help me in the ministry, I am sending him back to you for he is yours.

**(Philemon 1:15 NKJV) For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever,**

**(Philemon 1:16 NKJV) no longer as a slave but more than a slave; a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.**

*that you might receive him forever, - for eternity, from a slave to a brother.*

### **a praise report / what a story**

Onesimus is definitely a praise report, a testimony of how he was a runaway slave, but got saved on the road. He lived a life of sin, but then met this preacher and committed his life. This is what happened, and Paul says perhaps this is why he ran away, so that God would work on him while he was on the run. Perhaps.

### **Easier way**

But you know there was an easier way, there was a church right there in Philemon's house, he could have got saved in the very same house that he ran away from.

### **We always hear – the awesome testimony**

We always hear, ohh what an awesome testimony; ole Joe was on drugs, ran with the gang-bangers, but then he met Jesus. Or ole Mary ran away at 14, lived on the streets for 8 years, but then she met Jesus. Yes they are awesome testimonies.

### **Equally Awesome**

Let me tell you an equally awesome testimony, Allison got saved when she was three, loves the Lord with all her heart, walked in His ways, was obedient to His word, and today she is married with three kids.

### **Anybody can sin and mess up there life / Youth keep-on**

Listen, anybody can go out and sin, and live for the flesh, that's easy. But live a life of obedience from your youth, now that is truly amazing - Awesome. To live a life set-apart for the Lord from your youth, with all the lures and temptations put before them, that is a powerful testimony. You youth, don't be fooled by what the church calls an awesome testimony, I believe the people almost go oh ho hum, you never did nothing, you were a goody-goody all your life, - bring on the Biker. You youth, don't quit, keep on keeping on, you are building a testimony of power, an awesome testimony.

Plus, you are being protected form the gunk and the junk that pollutes the minds and lives of those who didn't keep-on keeping-on.

### **The Testimony of Christ: 17-19**

I call these verses the testimony of Christ, because they are the testimony of Christ working in and through people. It is a glorious thing when a man, woman, or child become like Jesus, and doing the things that Jesus would do.

**(Philemon 1:17 NKJV) If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.**

### **Powerful Example / Philemon could be resentful**

Paul says Philemon, receive Onesimus, just as if I was coming to you. There is power in this example, application for all of us. Philemon may have been bitter or resentful at Onesimus for bailing on him, but Paul says don't be, forgive him, look at him as if you were looking at me. Receive him to your home just as if I was coming to your home.

### **Jesus says the same / boss – spouse – parents / someone has to pay / paid on the Cross**

Jesus would say the same to us today. If you are bitter or resentful at that boss of yours, your parents, your spouse, or ex-spouse, that old boyfriend or girlfriend. You say someone has to pay, I have been wronged by them, Jesus says to you today, someone has paid, I paid for them on the cross, isn't that enough?

### **Jesus Loves them / Count me as a partner**

Jesus says I love them, I love them so much, they mean so much to me, that I went to the cross and died for them. If you count me as a partner, then receive them, just as if you were receiving me. If we are partners, than how can you hold bitterness towards them, how can you gossip about them, find faults and point them out to others, how can you do that if you are my partner?

### **It is covered with the blood**

Whatever they did to you, is covered by the blood, their faults and failures to you are hidden and concealed.

### **Ark of Covenant / tablets-manna-rod / Israel's failures**

In the Ark of the Covenant there were three things inside of it: The two tablets of the 10 Commandments, a jar filled with manna, and the Rod of Aaron which had budded. All these are mighty symbols of God's wonders, but they also represent something else. All three of thee things represents Israel's failures. God provided daily yet they complained about the manna, they broke the 10 Commandments, and the budding of Aaron's rod came after the people rebelled against God's leadership He had established in Aaron and Moses.

*(Hebrews 9:3 NKJV) and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, (Hebrews 9:4 NKJV) which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; (Hebrews 9:5 NKJV) and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*

### **Israel's failures / hidden in the coffin / mercy Seat**

They represent Israel's failures, but see where they rest? They are inside the ark, the coffin, and they are covered by mercy seat. It was on the mercy seat that the blood was sprinkled for the forgiveness of sins.

Whatever they have done to you, it is concealed, it is hidden, it has been covered by the blood.

Your failures are in there too!

If you count me as a partner, receive them as you would receive me.

**(Philemon 1:18 NKJV) But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.**

**(Philemon 1:19 NKJV) I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay; not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.**

### **Picture of substitution**

Paul here is a picture of Jesus Christ. I will take on a debt I didn't incur, so that another may be free. A beautiful picture of substitution, we will really study this deeper in Hebrews, but for now, notice the hear of Paul. Paul was willing to take on a debt that wasn't his, go the extra mile for another. You see, the more you become like Jesus.....the more you become like Jesus.

### **Farewell: 20-25**

**(Philemon 1:20 NKJV) Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.**

**(Philemon 1:21 NKJV) Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.**

*I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.* – No doubt Paul is talking about not just receiving him back, not just letting him live (for runaway was punishable by death), but even more than that – setting him free.

### **Abolish Slavery / legislate morality / change people inside out**

Notice Paul isn't trying to lead a movement to abolish slavery. He isn't trying to be a politician, he wasn't trying to legislate morality. Paul just worked on Philemon's heart. He works against slavery was one heart at a time. Paul was allowing the Holy Spirit to change people from the inside out. Do you want to see abortion reduced, go win a young girl to Christ. Do you want to see the gay and lesbian movement reduce, win a gay to Christ. Do you want to reduce teen pregnancy? – then get involved in the youth group. We will never be able to legislate morality, people will find a way around the law to satisfy their flesh. But win someone to Christ, and let the Holy Spirit work on them from the inside out, and we will see changes. Cultures and communities are changed when people are born-again. One heart at a time.

**(Philemon 1:22 NKJV) But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.**

**(Philemon 1:23 NKJV) Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,**

**(Philemon 1:24 NKJV) as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.**

Paul lays it on kinda of heavy here, ohh by the way I'm coming to visit you when I get out of prison.

Each one of these people listed here has a story to tell of God's greatest, and I look forward to meeting them. Saying Epaphras, I know recognize your name because I read my bible. So tell me what was it like ministering with Paul, were you in jail too, how did that happen? Ahh heaven is gona be a blast.

**(Philemon 1:25 NKJV) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**

We started this letter with grace, and end in grace, for it is all about grace, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Conclusion:**

Which of the three characters in this book best describe you?

Onesimus submitted to the Lord, he went back. He could have run, he must have thought about it on his 900 mile journey back home, but he didn't. If he did, then we wouldn't be reading about him, and talking about him today. You never know how or where your obedience to the Lord will lead on this earth, but one thing I can guarantee you, it will lead closer to God.

Philemon, based on his testimony, I believe he would have been all too eager to refresh Paul. I believe he sent Philemon back to Paul, as a free man. A man who didn't hold a grudge or resentment towards Philemon, but forgave him, accepted him as a brother.

Paul, the peacemaker, interceding to bring peace to two people at war. Paul did this in meekness, not lording over the situation. Paul willing to get his hands dirty, to get involved to bring peace, even to the point of willing to pay the debt if needed.

Someday's we have to be all three, or just on, but may the practical teachings of this book write on the tables of our heart, and we can be a refreshment to the saints, let the Holy Spirit do the work in peoples lives, seek out the so-called undesirable, set things right where they need to, and that we would be counted as a partner and let the wrongs be covered by the mercy seat.

The book of Philemon, what a wonderful, so often overlooked, book.