

A Study of the St. Paul's Letter to Philemon

Primary Reference: Nordling, *Philemon*, Concordia Commentary Series, St Louis: Concordia, 2004.

Pre-Course Quiz (Keep your Bibles closed – No cheating ☺)

Who was St. Paul? _____

Who was Philemon? _____

Who was Apphia? _____

Who was Archippus? _____

Who was Onesimus? _____

Who was Epaphras? _____

What appears to be the basic premise of the book of **Philemon**? _____

Background of the Book of Philemon

What do the following verses tell us about Paul, the inspired author of **Philemon**?

Acts 13:8 – 10 (pg 1354) _____

Acts 7:54 – 8:3 (pg 1345) _____

Galatians 1:13 – 24 (pg 1426) _____

Acts 21:37 – 22:16 (pg 1368) _____

Introductory Comment by John Nordling, M.Div, PhD:

Indeed, getting a handle on Philemon is like arriving late for a movie, attempting to catch up on who the characters are and what has been going on in the plot, and then being forced to leave the theater prematurely.

Let's Read **Philemon**. (pg 1465)

How would you describe the overall nature of the book? _____

Why do you think God would include a letter like this in the Canon of Scripture?

Let's examine the context of **Philemon**.

What do **Ephesians 6:21 – 22 (pg 1437)**, **Colossians 4:7 – 9 (pg 1446)**, and **Philemon 10 – 13 (pg 1465)** tell us about the relationship of these three letters of Paul?

Examine **Philemon 1 – 2** and **Colossians 4:17 (pg 1446)**. What do these verses tell us about Archippus as well as the relationship of the Colossian church to Philemon and his household?

Who is Epaphras? Read **Colossians 1:3 – 8 (pg 1443)** _____

How does **Philemon 23** relate Epaphras, Philemon, and the Colossian Church?

Read **Colossians 4:12 (pg 1446)**. Why do you think Epaphras is not with the Colossian congregation? (See **Colossians 2:1 – 5** for an idea.)

Compare **Philemon 1 – 2** with **Colossians 1:1 – 2** regarding authorship of both letters.

What does verse 1 of each book imply about authorship? _____

Look at **Philemon 4, 8 – 14, 12, 19 – 22 (pg 1465)**. How do these verses further illuminate who is the author of the letter?

Why do you think Timothy is then mentioned?

Considering the relationship of the book of **Philemon** to **Colossians** and **Ephesians**, as well as authorship, how do you think this factors into **Philemon** becoming part of the Canon of Scripture? See also **Colossians 4:16 (pg 1446)** to help with this question.

Read the following opening verses of all of Paul's letters. In each opening verse how does Paul describe himself to the recipient of the letter? What difference do you see in how he describes himself in **Philemon** vs his other books?

Romans 1:1 (pg 1379) _____

1 Corinthians 1:1 (pg 1398) _____

2 Corinthians 1:1 (pg 1415) _____

Galatians 1:1 (pg 1426) _____

Ephesians 1:1 (pg 1432) _____

Philippians 1:1 (pg 1438) _____

Colossians 1:1 (pg 1443) _____

1 Thessalonians 1:1 (pg 1447) _____

2 Thessalonians 1:1 (pg 1451) _____

1 Timothy 1:1 (pg 1454) _____

2 Timothy 1:1 (pg 1459) _____

Titus 1:1 (pg 1463) _____

How is **Philemon 1 (pg 1465)** different from his other epistles?

What is the significance of this difference? _____

What lesson(s) is (are) there for us in this approach to dealing with others?

Compare **Philemon 1** to **Philemon 15 – 16**. What is the significance as to how Paul refers to Philemon and Onesimus and what lesson(s) is (are) there for us?

Considering the nature of the letter to Philemon, what is the likely relationship of Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus in verse 2?

Considering that this is apparently a personal letter to Philemon, why would do you think Paul would address it also **“to the church that meets in your home”**? (Hint: See again **Colossians 4:9 (pg)** and also **Philemon 16 – 20.**)

How might verse 3 be used to argue both for and against the Trinity?

How do you think verse 4 impacted Philemon, his family, and the church that met in his house?

What lesson is there for us in this verse? _____

Compare the following translations of **Philemon 4 – 5**. How do you explain that we Paul is complimenting them for **“faith” “in”** or **“toward” “the Lord Jesus” and “all the saints”**?

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

Philemon 4 – 5 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. NIV

Philemon 4 – 5 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; NASB

Philemon 4 – 5 I give thanks to my God for you always when I mention you in my prayers, 5 Because I continue to hear of your love and of your loyal faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and [which you show] toward all the saints (God's consecrated people). AMP

What is God's call in verse 6 and what is the outcome?

How does this relate to our own Christian growth? _____

Why are we so reluctant to share our faith? _____

What are the **“good things”** we have in Christ? _____

What does verse 7 tell us about Philemon and the church that meets in his house?

Describe the nature and tone of Paul's appeal in verses 8 – 11.

What is there for us to learn in this approach about our own dealings with people?

Why does Paul describe himself as an **“old man”** and a **“prisoner of Christ Jesus”**? What is the point?

What is the significance of the words **“he became my son”** in verse 10 and **“now he has become useful”** in verse 11?

Do you think Lutherans are uncomfortable with the concept of being “born again”? How do you think a Lutheran congregation would react to an “Onesimus” returning to their midst claiming to have been born again and experiencing a miraculous transformation in Christ?

Read **Philemon 12 – 16**.

How do you think verse 12 was intended to impact Philemon?

What possible outcomes or final action by Philemon do you think is intended or hope for by Paul in verses 13 – 16?

What outcome do you think is hoped for by Paul in verse 16?

Why do you think Paul says **“He is very dear to me but even dearer to you...”**?

What lesson(s) in conflict resolution is (are) there for us in this verse?

What correlation to our salvation is there in verse 16?

Read **Philemon 17 – 20.**

What tactic or methodology is Paul using in verse 17 to restore Onesimus?

Do you think Paul is sincere in his offer in verses 18 – 19? Why or Why not?

What correlation is there in our relationship to God and what should be the impact in our daily lives?

What do you think Paul means in verse 20?

Read **Philemon 21 – 22.**

What “benefit” do you think Paul is hoping for in verse 21? (Hint: The Greek word for benefit is a play on words for Onesimus’ name.)

A minority of scholars have advocated that the “benefit” Paul is asking for is that Philemon return Onesimus to him as fellow worker. What do you think?

What does Paul mean by “**Confident of your obedience**”? To whom is Philemon going to be obedient?

What are the assumptions that go into verse 22?

Do you think there is a subtle threat to Philemon in verse 22? Why or why not?

Some might say, “If it is God’s will Paul will be able to travel and visit Philemon.” Do you really think it mattered whether Philemon, his family, and house church prayed or not?

Read **Philemon 23 – 25**.

Compare these verses to **Colossians 4:10 – 14 (pg)**. What is remarkable about Paul’s mention of Mark and how is that similar to Onesimus?

Read **2 Timothy 4:9 – 11**. Do you think these verses support the Lutheran viewpoint that a person has the power to turn away from God and lose their salvation?

How do you think the “once saved always saved” theology interprets these verses?

Paul’s uses his standard closing to Philemon. Why do you think he wishes “**grace**” to be with Philemon’s spirit? What does that mean?

What do you think was the outcome between Philemon and Onesimus when they met?

What evidence do we have to support that opinion? (Hint: think Canon of Scripture)

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”
Galatians 3:26 – 29 – NIV