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PHILEMON

STUDY GUIDE



PHILEMON

SCRIPTURE READING

Book of Philemon

THEME

Mercy and grace are the emphases of Philemon. Faith plays a vital role in the exercise of mercy and grace. Following Christ's example, we must place our emphasis upon mercy and grace, not judgment and punishment.

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Philemon is the shortest and most personal of all the letters that Paul wrote. It contains only 334 words in the Greek text.
- B. Philemon is about a runaway slave who receives Jesus and, afterward, is willing to return to his master and face the consequences.
- C. This letter serves as an analogy which portrays the believer's forgiveness in Christ.
 - 1. Like Onesimus, we are condemned by the law.
 - 2. Jesus Christ is our advocate, just as Paul was an advocate for Onesimus.
 - 3. Philemon is portrayed as the Father, Who alone has the power to forgive and to restore.
 - 4. The believer can certainly identify with Onesimus, who was condemned by law, but saved by grace.
- D. Paul sends this letter to the master of the runaway slave, Onesimus, by the hand of Onesimus.
- E. Philemon is believed to have been written while Paul was in prison at Rome.
- F. It is believed that Colossians and Philemon were written at approximately the same time.

- G. It appears that Philemon is a resident of Colosse. The church, which meets in the home of Philemon, could very well be the church of Colosse. (Colossians 4:9 & 17)
- H. Paul mentions eleven people by name in this short letter, but he does not refer to any geographical locations.
- I. Paul is writing to a friend and brother in Christ about a friend and brother in Christ.
- J. The letter to Philemon can be summarized with four words: prayer; petition; promise; and preparation.
 - 1. Paul prays and gives thanks to God for Philemon. (Verses 1-7)
 - 2. Paul petitions Philemon for Onesimus. (Verses 8-16)
 - 3. Paul promises to restore anything taken by and required of Onesimus. (Verses 17-21)
 - 4. Paul requests that Philemon prepare a place of lodging for him when he is released from prison. (Verses 22-25)

II. PAUL'S GREETING

- A. Paul opens this letter revealing his imprisonment, but he calls himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ. (Verse 1)
- B. Paul also mentions Timothy, who apparently, at the time of this letter, is with Paul. (Verse 1)
- C. There is no question that the letter is addressed to Philemon, who evidently, at some point in time, has worked with Paul. (Verse 1)
- D. Paul greets others who are known by both Paul and Philemon. (Verse 2)
 - 1. Apphia and Archippus are identified as fellow soldiers. (Verse 2; Colossians 4:17)
 - 2. Paul greets the church, which meets in the home of Philemon. (Verse 2)

- E. Paul begins the letter with, "Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Verse 3)
 - 1. This statement may have been made for the purpose of drawing Philemon's attention to grace and peace, not judgment and wrath.
 - 2. Grace and peace are from God; consequently, Philemon must follow the spirit, not the flesh.
- F. Paul tells Philemon that he continues to pray for him. (Verse 4)
- G. Paul tells Philemon that he has heard a good report concerning his love and faith toward Jesus and the saints. (Verse 5)
- H. Paul reveals to Philemon the way he has been praying for him.
 - 1. Paul has prayed that the fellowship of faith that he and Philemon share may become active. (Verse 6)
 - 2. Philemon's faith is to become active by recognizing the good things in himself through Jesus. (Verse 6)
- I. Paul commends Philemon for his love and care for the saints. (Verse 7)

III. PAUL'S REQUEST

- A. Paul begins by letting Philemon know that he could try to influence him in his decision-making, but he will not. (Verse 8)
 - 1. Paul appeals to Philemon in love.
 - 2. Paul refers to himself as an old man and a prisoner. (Verse 9)
- B. Paul intercedes for Onesimus and calls him his son. (Verse 10)
- C. Paul has won Onesimus to the Lord, even though he is in prison. (Verse 10)

- D. Paul recognizes that, prior to his salvation, Onesimus was unprofitable to Philemon, but now that Onesimus has received Jesus, he will be profitable to both Paul and Philemon. (Verse 11)
- E. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon and asks Philemon to receive Onesimus just as he would receive Paul himself. (Verse 12)
- F. Paul desires to keep Onesimus with him as his minister while he is in prison, but he will not usurp Philemon's authority. (Verse 13)
 - 1. Paul refuses to keep Onesimus without first reconciling the differences between Onesimus and Philemon.
 - 2. Paul wants Philemon to make his decision without coercion. (Verse 14)
- G. Paul suggests to Philemon that the temporary departure of Onesimus may result in a permanent loyalty. (Verse 15)
 - 1. Not only is Onesimus returning as a servant, but he is also returning as a Christian brother.
 - 2. Paul states that the relationship between Onesimus and himself is spiritual, but the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon can be both spiritual and physical. (Verse 16)
- H. Paul tells Philemon that, if he counts him as a partner, he should receive Onesimus just as he would receive Paul. (Verse 17)
- I. Paul obligates himself to pay any debt that Onesimus owes. (Verses 18-19)
- J. Paul tells Philemon that he will not talk about the (spiritual) debt Philemon owes him. (Verse 19)
- K. Paul exhorts Philemon to be merciful to him and to bring him joy through his treatment of Onesimus. (Verse 20)

- L. Paul tells Philemon that the reason he is writing this letter is that he has confidence in him that he will do the right thing.
 - 1. Paul's confidence is in Philemon's obedience to the Lord.
 - 2. Not only does Paul believe that Philemon will honor his request, but he believes that Philemon will do even more than he has requested. (Verse 21)
- M. Paul is planning to be released from prison, so he asks Philemon to prepare him a place of lodging. (Verse 22)
- N. Paul is trusting that Philemon's prayers will bring about his release from prison so that he can spend some time with Philemon. (Verse 22)

IV. PAUL'S CLOSING REMARKS

- A. Epaphras, who is a fellowprisoner of Paul, sends his greetings to Philemon, along with Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, and Lucas. (Verses 23-24)
- B. Paul ends this letter with his customary benediction: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." (Verse 25)

SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

Philemon - Creator God

Paul - Jesus the Intercessor

Onesimus - The Believer

ONESIMUS	THE BELIEVER
Runaway Slave	Sin caused us to run away from God
Paul was there for Onesimus in his time of trouble	Jesus is here for us in our time of trouble
Paul interceded for Onesimus	Jesus intercedes for us
Onesimus returned to Philemon in faith	We return to the Father in faith
Onesimus carried the letter of his salvation	We carry our seal of salvation
Onesimus returned as a brother	We return as a brother in God's family