



Bible Study with the Bishop

On Reading and Living by the Letter to Philemon

1 From Paul, who is a prisoner for the cause of Christ Jesus, and our brother Timothy. To Philemon our dearly loved coworker, 2 Apphia our sister, Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church that meets in your house. 3 May the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you. 4 Philemon, I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers 5 because I've heard of your love and faithfulness, which you have both for the Lord Jesus and for all God's people. 6 I pray that your partnership in the faith might become effective by an understanding of **all that is good among us in Christ**. 7 I have great joy and encouragement because of your love, since the hearts of God's people are refreshed by your actions, my brother.

8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence **in Christ** to command you to do the right thing, 9 I would rather appeal to you through love. I, Paul—an old man, and now also a prisoner for Christ Jesus— 10 appeal to you for my child Onesimus. I became his father in the faith during my time in prison. 11 He was useless to you before, but now he is useful to both of us. 12 I'm sending him back to you, which is like sending you my own heart. 13 I considered keeping him with me so that he might serve me in your place during my time in prison because of the gospel. 14 However, I didn't want to do anything without your consent so that your act of kindness would occur willingly and not under pressure. 15 Maybe this is the reason that Onesimus was separated from you for a while so that you might have him back forever— 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—that is, as a dearly loved brother. He is especially a dearly loved brother to me. How much more can he become a brother to you, personally and spiritually in the Lord.

17 So, if you really consider me a partner, welcome Onesimus as if you were welcoming me. 18 If he has harmed you in any way or owes you money, charge it to my account. 19 I, Paul, will pay it back to you (I'm writing this with my own hand). Of course, I won't mention that you owe me your life. 20 Yes, brother, I want this favor from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart **in Christ**.

21 I'm writing to you, confident of your obedience and knowing that you will do more than what I ask. 22 Also, one more thing—prepare a guest room for me. I hope that I will be released from prison to be with you because of your prayers. 23 Epaphras, who is in prison with me for the cause of Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as well as my coworkers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. 25 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.



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Why a bible study?

- Study of the scriptures was named as a means of grace by John Wesley.
- Fear of disagreement should not keep us from going deeper.
- Deeper is the way forward.
- Affords us a way to build relationships for ministry.
- Only difference teaches; maybe your greatest gift to me is your difference from me.

Why the Letter to Philemon?

- Letters feature: Christology, Ecclesiology, & Ethics
- Philemon (hiding between Titus and Hebrew) is the only personal letter of Paul that has survived.
- It dates to the mid-50's in the first century CE.

'Martyrs of Kansas' – March 30, 1860

Refers to a tragic event during the turbulence leading up to the American Civil War. On March 30, 1860 (two days before Palm Sunday), three Methodist preachers—Rev. B.L. Read, Rev. William Colpetzer, and Rev. John F. Campbell—were hanged by pro-slavery forces in Kansas.

Looking over the 25 verses of Philemon.

- The first three verses are an address.
- Followed by three more verses of thanksgiving (v 4 – 7).
- The body of the letter is verses 8 through 16.
- The recapitulation of the argument is summarized in verses 17 through 20.
- Conclusion in verses 21-25.
- Paul is writing from prison to Philemon, Apphia and Archippus and to the 'ecclesia' in their house as mentioned in verse one.
- Paul mentions his imprisonment 4 times in 13 verses.
 - John Dominic Crossan makes the basic assumption that the letters to Philemon and Philippians come from the same imprisonment at Ephesus.
- Many scholars believe that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (around the early to mid-50s CE).
- The letter is semipublic and intended to be read in the assembly of the house church even though the business in it only concerns Philemon directly.
- V.3 note how grace and peace summarizes the core of Paul's message and mission faith in theology.
- The usual salutation in a Greek letter was chaire/greetings but in a novel clever and profound word play, Paul switches to a similar sounding but theologically more significant term 'charis' which means, 'grace,' or 'free gift'.





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What does the term, 'in Christ' mean for:

- Romans 8.1
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-18
- I Thessalonians 4:13-18
- Galatians 3:27-28
- Philippians 2:5-8

The main question is, what exactly was Onesimus's status?

- "Search of Paul" by Crossan and Reed (p.107) features a section on the status of Onesimus, and how first century literature sheds light on the practices surrounding this letter.
- If he were such a fugitive it would have been suicidally dangerous to have gone anywhere near official Roman authority, let alone a Roman prisoner like Paul.
- Such an act would have endangered them both.
- It is much more likely that Onesimus was a supplicant seeking not permanent escape, but temporary **asylum**.
- One option was, 'flight to a God's temple.'
 - This could be for a temporary cooling off period from an angry owner for absolute repossession from a clearly unjust owner.
- The second option was flight to an owner's friend.
 - In the case of flight to an owner's friend, there was one additional nuance of importance.
 - Note that the slave is best served by fleeing 'upward,' fleeing to one who was his owner's friend-- but who could also operate from a position of superiority.

Note that Paul:

1. honors the person appealing for asylum, and
 2. demands liberty based on what sacrament
- Paul sees an impossible or intolerable opposition between a Christian master owning a **Christian slave**
 - The status as siblings in Christ comes first. All other status are read in light of our status as a Christian.

Note that Galatians 3:28 pairs slave and free male and female in the new status of equality in the Christian community as it is modeling Christ to the world.

What happened to the request? To Onesimus?

