THE EPISTLE OF PAUL
TO
PHILEMON

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THE EPISTLE OF PAUL
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PHILEMON

Author: Paul the apostle with Timothy the brother (v. 1).

Time of Writing: Approximately A.D. 64, shortly before Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment (vv. 9, 22).

Place of Writing: A Roman prison; see verses in the previous item.

Recipients: Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church, which was in their house (vv. 1-2).

Subject:
An Illustration of the Believers’ Equal Status in the New Man

I. Introduction
vv. 1-3

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and bTimothy the brother, to Philemon our beloved and cfellow worker
2 And to 1Apphia the asister and to 1bArchippus our cfellow soldier and to the 2dchurch, which is in your house:
3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. A Slave Reborn to Be a Brother
vv. 4-16

4 I athank my God always, making bmention of you in my prayers,
5 Hearing of your 1love and the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and to all the saints,

21 According to the familial nature of this Epistle, Apphia must have been Philemon’s wife, and Archippus, his son.

22 Philemon lived in Colossae (v. 2 cf. Col. 4:17; v. 10 cf. Col. 1:2; 4:9) and according to history was an elder of the church there. It must have been that the church in Colossae met in his house. Hence, it was the church in his house.

51 In the initial stage of the life of a believer, faith comes first, and then, out of faith, love is produced (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4; see notes 141 in 1 Tim. 1 and 232 in Eph. 6). But here love is mentioned first and then faith, because the matter of the equal status of the believers, dealt with in this Epistle, is a matter of love, which comes out of faith. In the new man the members love one another in faith (Titus 3:15).
6 That the fellowship of your faith may become effective in the 1full 2knowledge of 2every good thing which is in 3you 4for Christ.

7 1For I had much ajoy and bencouragement over your love, because the 2cinward parts of the saints have been 3drefreshed through you, 4brother.

8 Therefore though I have much aboldness in Christ to bcharge you what is cfitting,

9 Because of love I rather aentreat, being such a one as Paul 1the aged and now also a 2bprisoner of Christ Jesus.

10 I entreat you concerning my achild, whom I have 1bbegotten in my cbonds, 2dOnesimus,

11 Who formerly was 1useless to you but now is 2useful both to you and to me.

Their relationship is of love through faith. The apostle appreciated the fellowship of Philemon’s faith (v. 6) and was encouraged by his love (v. 7); thus, he entreated Philemon to receive Onesimus because of this love (v. 9). These two virtues are referred to in combination here; Philemon had both of them, not only toward the Lord but also to all the saints.

6 I.e., full acknowledgment, full appreciation, and full recognition through experience.

6 Not natural things (cf. Rom. 7:18) but spiritual and divinely good things, such as the love and the faith that Philemon had toward the Lord Jesus. These good things are in us, the regenerated believers, but are not in natural men.

6 Some ancient MSS read, us.

6 Lit., unto, toward. All the spiritual and divinely good things in us are unto Christ, toward Christ, for Christ. The apostle prayed that the fellowship, the communication, the sharing of Philemon’s faith toward all the saints might become effective in them in the element and sphere of the full knowledge, the full realization, of all the good things in us for Christ, causing them to acknowledge, appreciate, and recognize all the spiritual and divinely good things that are in the believers for Christ.

7 For introduces the reason that the apostle prayed for Philemon’s faith to become effective in the saints (v. 6), the reason being that Philemon’s love had refreshed the inward parts of the saints and, hence, had rendered the apostle much joy and encouragement.

7 Lit., bowels.

7 Soothed, cheered.

9 Or, an ambassador (Eph. 6:20).

9 Prisoner here, fellow prisoner in v. 23, and bonds in v. 13 indicate that this Epistle was written during the apostle’s first imprisonment in Rome. See note 62 in 2 Tim. 4.

10 Through the Spirit with the eternal life of God (John 3:3; 1:13).

10 The name in Greek means profitable, useful, helpful; it was a common name for slaves. He was Phil- lemon’s purchased bondslave, who, according to Roman law, had no human rights. He ran away from his master, thus committing a crime punishable by death. While he was in prison at Rome with the apostle, he was saved through him. Now the apostle sent him back with this Epistle to his master.

11 Or, unserviceable. Referring to Onesimus’s running away from Philemon.

11 Or, serviceable. Because Onesimus had been converted and was willing to return to Philemon.
12 Him I have sent back to you—him, that is, my very heart—
13 Whom I intended to keep with myself that on your behalf he might minister to me in the bonds of the gospel.
14 But without your mind I did not want to do anything, that your goodness would not be as of necessity, but voluntary.
15 For perhaps for this reason he was separated from you for but an hour, that you might fully have him forever,
16 No longer as a slave, but above a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

III. A Brother Recommended for the New Man’s Acceptance vv. 17-22

17 If then you hold me as a partner, receive him as myself.

12 Lit., bowels; as in vv. 7, 20 (inward parts), Phil. 1:8 (inward parts), Phil. 2:1 (tenderheartedness), and Col. 3:12 (inward parts), signifying inward affection, tenderheartedness, compassions. Paul’s inward affection and compassions went with Onesimus to Philemon.
14 Just as the Lord would not do anything without our consent.
15 For introduces the reason for the sending in v. 12.
16 This short Epistle serves the special purpose of showing us the equality, in God’s eternal life and divine love, of all the members in the Body of Christ. In the semisavage age of Paul, the life of Christ had annulled, among the believers, the strong institution of slavery. Since the sentiment of the love of the Christian fellowship was so powerful and prevailing that the evil social order among fallen mankind was spontaneously ignored, any need for institutional emancipation was obviated. Because of the divine birth and because they were living by the divine life, all the believers in Christ had equal status in the church, which was the new man in Christ and in which there was no discrimination between free and bond (Col. 3:10-11). This was based on three facts: (1) Christ’s death on the cross abolished the ordinances of the different ways of life, for the creating of the one new man (Eph. 2:15); (2) we all were baptized into Christ and were made one in Him without any differences (Gal. 3:27-28); and (3) in the new man Christ is all and in all (Col. 3:11). Such a life with such a love in equal fellowship is well able to maintain good order in the church (in Titus), carry out God’s economy concerning the church (in 1 Timothy), and stand against the tide of the church’s decline (in 2 Timothy). It is of the Lord’s sovereignty that in the arrangement of the New Testament this Epistle was positioned after the three preceding books.
16 Or, more than a slave. Onesimus was even more than a free man—he was a beloved brother.
16 A beloved brother here, the sister (v. 2), our beloved and fellow worker (v. 1), our fellow soldier (v. 2), my fellow workers (v. 24), my fellow prisoner (v. 23), and a partner (v. 17)
18 And if he has wronged you in anything or owes anything, charge that to my account.

19 I, Paul, have written with my own hand: I will repay; not to say to you that you owe me even your own self besides.

20 Yes, a brother, may I have profit from you in the Lord; refresh my inward parts in Christ.

21 Having confidence in your obedience, I have written to you, knowing that you will do even beyond the things that I say.

22 And at the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

IV. Conclusion

vv. 23-25

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you;


25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

are all intimate terms, indicating the apostle’s intimate sentiment concerning his relationship with the members in the new man.

16 I.e., in the flesh as a slave and in the Lord as a brother. In the flesh Onesimus was a brother as a slave, and in the Lord he was a slave as a brother.

17 Just as a local church with its elders is in partnership with the Lord, and the Lord entrusts to them the newly saved ones, as the good Samaritan did with the healed one (Luke 10:33-35).

18 This indicates the deep relationship of fellowship in the Lord.

19 This indicates that Onesimus had defrauded his master.

20 In caring for Onesimus, Paul did exactly what the Lord does for us.

21 Just as the Lord pays everything for His redeemed.

22 This indicates that Philemon had been saved through Paul himself.

23 Gk. onaimen, similar in sound to Onesimus (both words meaning profitable). Here, this word is an allusion to the name Onesimus. This is a play on words, implying that since “you owe me even your own self, you are an Onesimus to me—hence, you should be profitable to me, i.e., should let me have profit from you in the Lord.”

24 Soothe, cheer.

25 Lit., bowels, as in v. 7. Since Philemon had refreshed the inward parts of the saints, his partner now asked him to do the same for him in the Lord.

26 This expectation, that he would be liberated from his imprisonment and visit the churches again, is expressed also in Phil. 1:25 and 2:24.

27 Paul considered that his visit would be a gracious gift to the church.

28 A contraction of Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25; 4:18).

29 The apostle always greeted the recipients of his Epistles, in both the opening and the conclusion, with the
grace of the Lord. This shows that he trusted in the Lord’s grace, being confident that this grace would enable them, as well as himself (1 Cor. 15:10), to accomplish what he wrote to them. No human effort avails for the accomplishing of a revelation as high as the completing revelation of the apostle Paul—for this the Lord’s grace is needed.

25 See note 18 in Gal. 6.

25 Some ancient MSS add, Amen.
THE
NEW TESTAMENT

Recovery Version

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