

The Little Letter to Philemon

Paul's smallest New Testament letter seems almost too insignificant to be included in the canon of Scripture. It appears to be nothing more than an oversized post card. Why was it included anyway? Why did the church keep it? Why was it read in all the churches around the world in the first century? What is its significance for us today in the 21st century?

Summary of Philemon

Philemon is a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to a friend who lived in the city of Colosse. Paul was a prisoner in Rome. He was under house arrest but chained to two jailors. While there he had a strange visitor from someone he only known casually when he had been in Philemon's home. He was a slave from Colosse, in fact, he was Philemon's slave.

Onesimus had rebelled against his masters, stolen something of value, and had run away seeking freedom in Rome. Like the prodigal son, once he had wasted all the money he stolen he was down and out and living on the streets a wanted man. Paul spoke with Onesimus and pointed him to the only one who could save him from himself, and that was Jesus Christ. Paul led Onesimus to put his trust in Jesus and he was wonderfully saved, his sins were forgiven, his heart was transformed and his name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Like the thief on the cross, and not unlike Paul himself, in a moment he was transformed.

Paul is writing this letter to his friend Philemon to reintroduce his former slave Onesimus not as a run away slave, but as a changed man, a repentant sinner, a forgiven child of God and a brother in Christ.

Paul begs Philemon not to beat him or execute him as was his right to do, but to receive him in to his household as a beloved brother. Paul promised to repay any debt that Onesimus owed to his master, but reminded Philemon that he too was once a sinner and found Christ through the Apostle Paul.

It is a wonderful story of redemption and forgiveness. Philemon evidently did as Paul instructed. We hear of Onesimus only briefly as a servant of Christ who called the Letter of Colossians to the church in Philemon's house. Later Onesimus became the bishop of the church in Ephesus until his death by martyrdom.

Why did this book make it into the Canon of Scripture?

Because of its important Gospel themes.

1. Redemption – lost people matter to God
2. Repentance – true repentance
3. Regeneration – being transformed
4. Reconciliation – restoring peace
5. Restitution – making wrongs right

Romans 1:16

The power of the Gospel
The power of a transformed life
The power of forgiveness

Scriptures to Remember and Memorize

Philemon 1:11

Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

Philemon 1:15-16

Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.

2 Corinthians 2:6-11

The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. The reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Matthew 18:15-10

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Biblical Exposition

As we begin this brief exploration of the letter let me first say a word about Biblical Exposition. To most of us that is a strange term. We are used to topical or topical-textual messages of self-help, health, prosperity and relevant relationships. Few pastors are preaching the WORD. They preach about the Word but not from the Word. Biblical Exposition is a careful examination of the Word of God because we believe God inspired words as well as ideas in the Bible. So, when I look at a text of Scripture my desire is to pour over it with a fine tooth comb, looking for all the truth that is hidden there. It is like squeezing an orange to get all the natural juices and vitamins from it. I don't want it pasteurized and homogenized. I want the real stuff, not fluff.

Paul exhorted Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15-17...

“Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Therefore when we look at any passage of Scripture it is not just to read it, but to understand it and apply it to our present lives and context.

Expositional Study means we examine...

1. The historical background.
2. The characters mentioned.
3. The word studies to understand the meaning.
4. Personal applications that make it personal.
5. Relevant illustrations that make it clear.

PEPSI acronym.

Finally we encourage every believer to examine any passage with a view to answer the PEPSI acronym.

P – is there a promise to claim?

E – is there an example to follow?

P – is there something to pray about?

S – is there sin to avoid?

I – is there an instruction or command to obey?

What is Your Vantage Point?

It is not good to read and study Scripture at arms length. One must put himself into the story. We must all identify with the characters. We need to wear the story as our own as though we were there.

Who are you in this story?

Paul – do you win souls like Paul, pray like Paul, make peace like Paul?

Onesimus – are you the failure and the one needing reconciliation?

Philemon – are you the offended one, the bitter one, the angry one?

Onesimus = “Once-I-Was-A-Mess” – his name actually means “useful.” Paul uses a pun in verse 11: “Once he was ‘useless’, but now he is ‘useful.’”

What to bring to these studies

Therefore as we gather together each Thursday evening, or even if you listen in by audio or video broadcast, that you have a good Study Bible with you along with a notebook and a pen to take notes. Of course we will always have an outline to hand out with suggested questions and discussion points so we can share insights together.

We are meeting every Thursday evening from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at my house, 1394 South Center Street Extension, Grove City, PA 16127. That is on Route 208 near Katie’s Corner and George Junior Road. We are the 3rd house west of George Jr Road – red house with green shutters. “We’ll leave the light on for ya.”

Our Study of Philemon

- Sunday Philemon Preaching – March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31
- Thursday Bible Study - March 7, 14, 21, 28

Online Message and Notes

Because not everyone can make it to a mid-week study we are providing study notes, audio preaching, and some video clips so that others may follow along as we study the truths God ordained for the church from the book of Philemon. You can find these helps at: www.MinistryToday.org

Paul's Letter to Philemon (NIV)

The Greeting

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—2 also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and **to the church that meets in your home:**

The Prayer

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. 7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

The Appeal

8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, 9 yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—10 that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. **11 Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.** 12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.

The Transformation - Useless to Useful

13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. **15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.** He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

The Wrong - Restitution

18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. 22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

The Farewell Greetings

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

<u>Hymns:</u>	<u>Word Studies:</u>	<u>Key Verses & Related</u>
Thanks to Calvary	Heart/bowels – <i>splagchnon</i>	Phil. 1:11
A New Name Written in Glory	Partner – <i>koinonia</i>	Phil. 1:15-16
He Touched Me	Love – <i>agape</i>	2 Corinthians 5:17-20
Amazing Grace	Slave – <i>doulos</i>	Matthew 18:15-10
I Believe in Miracles	Beloved – <i>agapetos</i>	2 Timothy 2:15-17

View extended [notes](#), [powerpoint](#), [audio sermon](#) and [video clips](#) online at www.MinistryToday.org.