

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to

# **PHILEMON**

# Books of the Bible

Old Testament

New Testament

Law

Gospels

Church History

History

Letters

Poetry

Major Prophets

Letters

Minor Prophets

Letters

Prophecy

Paul's letter to Philemon is sometimes classified with the pastoral epistles.

Acts 13 to 28: ... unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

13 14 15 16 18 19 21 22 28



48 AD 49 50 53 57 60 62 67 68

GALATIANS

1 THESSALONIANS

1 CORINTHIANS

EPHESIANS

1 TIMOTHY

2 TIMOTHY

2 THESSALONIANS

2 CORINTHIANS

COLOSSIANS

TITUS

ROMANS

PHILEMON

PHILIPPIANS

Paul wrote 4 letters during his first imprisonment in Rome that are included in the New Testament.

Acts 13 to 28: ... unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

13 14 15 16 18 19 21 22 28

**1**  
Galatia

Jerusalem  
Council

**2**  
Macedonia  
Achaia  
Greece

**3**  
Asia

Trials

**1**  
Rome

Freedom  
from Bonds

**2**  
Rome

Church  
Expansion

48 AD

49

50

53

57

60

62

67

68

GALATIANS

1  
THESSALONIANS

1  
CORINTHIANS

EPHESIANS

1 TIMOTHY

2 TIMOTHY

2  
THESSALONIANS

2  
CORINTHIANS

COLOSSIANS

TITUS

ROMANS

PHILEMON

PHILIPPIANS

The others were written to entire congregations; this letter was to one man.

[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

Even this short letter (25 verses in total) has a very intricate structure.

[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

## 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

This letter was sent from Rome from both Paul and Timothy, who was also known to Philemon.

### **Philemon 1:1-3**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon *our* dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- <sup>2</sup> And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus *our* fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- <sup>3</sup> Grace to you, and peace, from God *our* Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.





## 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

Philemon is greeted with affection and respect.

### **Philemon 1:1-3**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto **Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,**
- <sup>2</sup> And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- <sup>3</sup> Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.





Two pieces of evidence indicate that Philemon was a wealthy man. First, his home was large enough to be the meeting place for the church.

### Philemon 1:1-3

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- <sup>2</sup> And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, **and to the church in thy house:**
- <sup>3</sup> Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



## 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

(Church historians agree that Christians met in private homes until the 3rd century AD.)

### Philemon 1:1-3

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- <sup>2</sup> And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, **and to the church in thy house:**
- <sup>3</sup> Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



The second indication of Philemon's wealth was (as shall be seen), he owned slaves.

**Philemon 1:1-3**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon *our* dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- <sup>2</sup> And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus *our* fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- <sup>3</sup> Grace to you, and peace, from God *our* Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Apphia was very likely the wife of Philemon.

**Philemon 1:1-3**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- <sup>2</sup> And to our beloved **Apphia**, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- <sup>3</sup> Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Archippus was likely the elder of the church. He is given a warning and exhortation in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

**Colossians 4:17**

And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

**Philemon 1:1-3**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- <sup>2</sup> And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- <sup>3</sup> Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



This is Paul's customary benediction.

Grace and peace are gifts from God through his Son. Truly there is no peace without grace, and no grace without peace.

### Philemon 1:1-3

- <sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
- <sup>2</sup> And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- <sup>3</sup> **Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction



## 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

It is possible that these two men never met face-to-face, but Paul was keenly aware of Philemon's history of benevolence to the church.

### **Philemon 1:4-6**

- 4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,
- 5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;
- 6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.



## 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

Paul prayed that word of Philemon's faith (demonstrated by his good works towards the church) would spread, so that all would see Christ's blessing upon his life, and glorify God.

### **Philemon 1:4-6**

- 4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,
- 5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;
- 6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.



## 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

Paul prayed that word of Philemon's faith (demonstrated by his good works towards the church) would spread, so that all would see Christ's blessing upon his life, and glorify God.

This is what Christ wants for us all.

### **Matthew 5:16**

<sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

## 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

This generosity of spirit had been Philemon's manner all along.

### **Philemon 1:7**

- <sup>7</sup> For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.



## 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

“The bowels were regarded by the Hebrews as the seat of the tenderer affections, esp. kindness, benevolence, compassion; hence, our heart (tender mercies, affections, etc.)”

STRONG'S BIBLE CONCORDANCE

### Philemon 1:7

- <sup>7</sup> For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because **the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.**



## 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

And this is why Paul knew he could count on Philemon for something that went beyond the usual request.

### **Philemon 1:7**

<sup>7</sup> For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.





[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

8 What I might, but will not

9 Paul, the aged

Being who he was, Paul was in a position to simply *tell* Philemon what he wanted done. But also being who he was, Paul expressed his desire as a *request*.

### Philemon 1:8-9

- 8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,  
9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*,  
being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.



8 What I might, but will not

9 Paul, the aged

To “enjoin” someone is to give him an order or command.

“That which is convenient” is that which is fitting or appropriate.

### Philemon 1:8-9

- 8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ **to enjoin thee that which is convenient,**
- 9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech *thee*, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.



8 What I might, but will not

9 Paul, the aged

Paul was pressing Philemon to make a certain sacrifice, not out of duty to Paul (although that was clearly owed), but for the sake of Christian love.

### Philemon 1:8-9

- 8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,
- 9 **Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee,**  
being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

The largest section of this letter is about this man.

Paul's request was for a runaway slave named Onesimus, who was still bound to Philemon.

Onesimus had fled from Colosse to Rome. There he met Paul, who led him to salvation in the name of Jesus Christ.

**Philemon 1:10-11**

- <sup>10</sup> I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, **whom I have begotten in my bonds:**
- <sup>11</sup> Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:



It is fair to assume that Onesimus kept his situation a secret from Paul for some time before making his confession.

It must have come as quite a surprise to him that Paul actually knew the man he had run from.

**Philemon 1:10-11**

- <sup>10</sup> I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, **whom I have begotten in my bonds:**
- <sup>11</sup> Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:





As a runaway, he had been a very unprofitable servant to Philemon. But now as a Christian brother, he was profitable to them both, for he had become a very devoted servant to Paul.

**Philemon 1:10-11**

- <sup>10</sup> I beseech thee for **my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:**
- <sup>11</sup> Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:



Paul was now sending Onesimus back to his master, as was the right thing to do.

But Paul wanted Philemon to know that Onesimus had become quite dear to him, and he would have much preferred for Onesimus to stay with him in Rome.

**Philemon 1:12-13**

- <sup>12</sup> Whom I have sent again:  
thou therefore receive him,  
that is, mine own bowels:
- <sup>13</sup> Whom I would have retained with  
me, that in thy stead he might have  
ministered unto me in the bonds of  
the gospel:



It is very likely that the penalty for a runaway slave was death, and this was one reason Paul was so adamant in his plea for this man.

**Philemon 1:12-13**

- <sup>12</sup> Whom I have sent again:  
thou therefore receive him,  
that is, mine own bowels:
- <sup>13</sup> Whom I would have retained with  
me, that in thy stead he might have  
ministered unto me in the bonds of  
the gospel:



Nevertheless Paul knew that Philemon had the final word in the matter. It was not up to him to decide Onesimus's fate.

**Philemon 1:14**

<sup>14</sup> **But without thy mind would I do nothing;** that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.



He knew that Philemon's mercy toward Onesimus would be rewarded in heaven – but only if the act came from his heart.

**Philemon 1:14**

<sup>14</sup> But without thy mind would I do nothing; **that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.**



He knew that Philemon's mercy toward Onesimus would be rewarded in heaven – but only if the act came from his heart.

### 2 Corinthians 9:7

7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

### Philemon 1:14

<sup>14</sup> But without thy mind would I do nothing; **that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.**



Paul makes the bold suggestion that Onesimus' running away was an act of providence so he would return to Philemon as a brother in the Lord.

**Philemon 1:15-16a:**

- <sup>15</sup> For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;
- <sup>16</sup> Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved,





And this, Paul reminds him, made him much more valuable to them both.

**Philemon 1:16b:**

<sup>16</sup> specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

Now the structure starts to mirror itself.

Paul wanted to be sure that Onesimus would be well-treated upon his return. He therefore made a personal pledge to Philemon on his behalf:

**Philemon 1:17-18**

- <sup>17</sup> If thou count me therefore a partner, **receive him as myself.**
- <sup>18</sup> If he hath wronged thee, or oweth *thee* ought, **put that on mine account;**



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

However, Paul also reminded Philemon of his own indebtedness to him!

**Philemon 1:19**

<sup>19</sup> I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.



## 19 What I might, but will not

However, Paul also reminded Philemon of his own indebtedness to him!

He says, “I do not say to thee”...  
but then says it anyway!

### **Philemon 1:19**

<sup>19</sup> I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

As you have refreshed others, Paul says to Philemon, so now refresh me.

**Philemon 1:20**

<sup>20</sup> Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord:  
refresh my bowels in the Lord.





Paul now frames his request in terms of both Philemon's obedience to God and Paul's confidence in him.

This is now a favor that Philemon knows he cannot refuse.

**Philemon 1:21**

<sup>21</sup> Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

As an added incentive, Paul let Philemon know that he expected to be soon released from prison, crediting Philemon's prayers for this happy development.

**Philemon 1:22**

<sup>22</sup> But withal prepare me also a lodging:  
for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.



## 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

As an added incentive, Paul let Philemon know that he expected to be soon released from prison, crediting Philemon's prayers for this happy development.

He would then be able to visit him – and see for himself how Onesimus was being treated!

### **Philemon 1:22**

<sup>22</sup> But withal prepare me also a lodging:  
for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.



## 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

Paul used everything short of twisting his arm to persuade Philemon to do the right thing. But this is exactly what it means to “beseech” someone to conduct himself as a Christian.

### **Philemon 1:22**

<sup>22</sup> But withal prepare me also a lodging:  
for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.



Paul used everything short of twisting his arm to persuade Philemon to do the right thing. But this is exactly what it means to “beseech” someone to conduct himself as a Christian.

**Romans 12:1**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*

**Philemon 1:22**

<sup>22</sup> But withal prepare me also a lodging:  
for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

The last three verses of Paul's letter to Philemon contain his greeting to various members of the church.

**Philemon 1:23-24**

- <sup>23</sup> There salute thee Epaphras,  
my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;  
<sup>24</sup> Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas,  
Lucas, my fellowlabourers.





Along with Onesimus, each of these men are named in the closing verses of Colossians.

Onesimus (4:9)

Epaphras (4:12)

Marcus and Aristarchus (4:10)

Demas and Lucas (4:14)

### **Philemon 1:23-24**

<sup>23</sup> There salute thee Epaphras,  
my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

<sup>24</sup> Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas,  
Lucas, my fellowlabourers.



Once again, Paul's message begins and ends with grace.

**Philemon 1:25**

<sup>25</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
*be with your spirit. Amen.*



The postscript to this epistle is not included in all Bible versions.

**Philemon 1:25**

<sup>25</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
*be* with your spirit. Amen.

Written from Rome to Philemon,  
by Onesimus a servant.



The postscript to this epistle is not included in all Bible versions.

This underscores the fact that Onesimus was indeed a helper to Paul, and that he knew what Paul had written to Philemon!

**Philemon 1:25**

<sup>25</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
*be* with your spirit. Amen.

Written from Rome to Philemon,  
by Onesimus a servant.



[A] 1-3 Salutation and Benediction

[B] 4-6 Paul's prayer for Philemon

[C] 7 Paul's joy in Philemon

[D] 8 What I might, but will not

[E] 9 Paul, the aged

[F] 10-16 Onesimus

[E] 17-18 Paul, the debtor

[D] 19 What I might, but will not

[C] 20-21 Paul's joy in Philemon

[B] 22 Philemon's Prayer for Paul

[A] 23-25 Salutation and Benediction

Even this short letter, the hand of God is very evident.



**WTWH.org**