

Philemon 1:1

THE ARGUMENT

This Epistle is different from the other Epistles, because it is written upon a particular subject, of more special concernment: that it was written by Paul it is not doubted, it hath what he calleth his *token in every Epistle*, 2Th 3:17. Who this Philemon was is not so easily determined. Some have judged him a Phrygian, and of Colosse: see Col 4:9. He appeareth to have been a minister by Paul's calling him his *fellow labourer*, Phm 1:1, his *brother*, Phm 1:7, his *partner*, Phm 1:17. It is conjectured that he was one hi the conversion of whom God made use of Paul as an instrument, from ver. 19, where Paul tells him, that he would not say that he owed unto him his own self. He seems to have been a man of some estate, for he kept a servant, and *refreshed the bowels of the saints*, Phm 1:7. He had a company of Christians in his house, Phm 1:2. The time when Paul wrote this Epistle is not certain; it was when he was *aged* and a *prisoner*, Phm 1:9, from whence it is evident that it was written from Rome. Some think it was written before the Second Epistle to Timothy, because he speaks of hopes that he had of being restored to his liberty, Phm 1:22. and in his Epistle to Timothy, 2Ti 4:7, he seems to have no such hopes. He also here, Phm 1:24, sends him the salutation of Demas, who he saith, 2Ti 4:10, had forsaken him. Others think it was written after that, when Demas was again returned to him; but it is not so clear that he ever returned. It is very probable that it was written much about the same time with the Epistle to the Colossians, for mention is made of *Onesimus* as a *faithful brother*, Col 4:9; there is also mention made of *Marcus*, *Aristarchus*, *Epaphras*, *Lucas*, and *Demas*, and *Archippus*, who are all named in this Epistle, and no more are here named, but *Apphia*. The scope of the Epistle is evident, to reconcile Onesimus to Philemon. Onesimus had been a servant to Philemon, and it should seem had wronged him by purloining some of his goods. He came to Rome, and was there converted by Paul, being a prisoner, Phm 1:10. The apostle would not detain him, being another man's servant, but sends him back with this recommendatory letter to his master. This recommendation was the occasion and is the matter of this Epistle; in the penning of which the apostle showeth himself as much an orator, as he had in his Epistle to the Romans, and some other of his Epistles, showed his skill at an argument; for the Epistle is penned with great art, and many topics are used to persuade Philemon again to receive

him into his service; some such, as would incline one to think, that Paul knew this Philemon was something covetous, and would be a little difficult to grant his request.

Chapter Summary

Phm 1:1-3 The salutation.

Phm 1:4-7 Paul declareth his joy in hearing of the love and faith of Philemon,

Phm 1:8-21 earnestly entreating him to receive into his favour his once fugitive servant Onesimus, now become a faithful Christian.

Phm 1:22 He desireth him to provide a lodging for himself, who was in expectation of a speedy release,

Phm 1:23-25 and concludeth with salutations and a benediction.

Ver. 1. *Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ;* that is, for the sake of Christ, for the gospel, and for preaching of Jesus Christ.

And Timothy our brother; from whence it is evident that Timothy was come to Paul at Rome, according to his desire, 2Ti 4:9,21, before this Epistle was written, which manifesteth that Second Epistle not to have been the last he wrote. The apostle useth to join some others with himself in his salutation; Sosthenes, 1Co 1:1 Timothy; 2Co 1:1 Php 1:1 Col 1:1 1Th 1:1, where Silvanus also is added; from whence it appeareth that Timothy was Paul's ordinary companion, and the apostle showeth his humility in joining the name of so young a man with his own.

Fellow labourer; whence we gather that Philemon was not a Christian only, but a minister, probably one of the ministers in Colosse in Phrygia, for it appeareth that Onesimus his servant was a Colossian, Col 4:9.

Philemon 1:2

Ver. 2. *Apphia* was the Roman name of a woman; the naming of her before Archippus, a minister, makes it probable she was Philemon's wife. It appears this *Archippus* was a minister, from Col 4:17. He calleth him his

fellow soldier, because he was engaged in some of those many dangers Paul encountered, but we are not told in Scripture which.

And to the church in thy house; all those Christians that live in thy family: we have the like expression, Ro 16:5 1Co 16:19 Col 4:15. The apostle doth not always by the term *church* signify a body under ecclesiastical discipline, but sometimes calleth a company of Christians ordinarily conversing together by that name. Those who think the body of the church were wont constantly to meet in Philemon's house, seem not to consider how the dangers of those times made such a thing hardly practicable.

Philemon 1:3

Ver. 3. The common salutation: See Poole on "Ro 1:7", See Poole on "1Co 1:3" and See Poole on "2Co 1:2".

Philemon 1:4

Ver. 4. See Poole on "2Ti 1:3".

Philemon 1:5

Ver. 5. *Hearing of thy love;* thy love to God and to the saints, Phm 1:7. The apostle putteth love here before faith, contrary to the true order of those spiritual habits, for love must be the fruit of faith,

which worketh by love, and to his own order in other places, 1Ti 2:7 2Ti 1:13 possibly to show us that he spake of that love which is conjoined with faith, and of that faith which showeth its truth by love.

And faith; faith in Christ.

Which thou hast towards the Lord Jesus; that faith which thou hast in Christ, reposing thy confidence in him for salvation, and that love which worketh in thee towards Christ.

And toward all saints; and is seen in thy readiness to do good to all Christians, such especially as are saints indeed; because thy goodness extendeth not to God, thou showest it to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, like David, Ps 16:2,3.

Philemon 1:6

Ver. 6. *That the communication of thy faith:* the word sometime signifieth communion, in all which there is a mutual communication between those with whom the communion is. That thou mayst declare that thou hast the same common faith with us, thou communicatest the fruits of it.

May become effectual; and showest that it is not a dead, inoperative faith, but the true *faith of God's elect*, Tit 1:1, working by love, Ga 5:6, and showing itself by good works, Jas 2:18.

By the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus; that every *good thing*, every good habit of grace which Jesus Christ hath wrought in thy soul, might be acknowledged by others, (the servants of Christ), to whom thou declarest thy love and goodness.

Philemon 1:7

Ver. 7. *For we have great joy and consolation in thy love;* thy love doth not extend only to the poor distressed saints helped and relieved by thee, but it hath its effect upon others together with myself; it is a wonderful joy and comfort to us to hear that God hath so opened and enlarged thy heart: the fruits of grace in one, are a true cause of joy and thanksgiving to all Christians, because God by them is glorified.

Because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother; the saints, or the bowels of the saints, *αναπεπαισται*, are brought to a rest, as travellers after their journey, or labourers after their day's labour, when they come to sit still.

Philemon 1:8

Ver. 8. *Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ;* in the Greek it is: Wherefore, having much *παρρησιαν*, boldness, liberty or freedom of speech, or much power and authority, or right, as Heb 10:19, for Christ's sake, being Christ's apostle, or speaking for the sake of Christ.

To enjoin thee; to command thee, authoritatively.

That which is convenient; το ανηκον, things that are expedient, or convenient, fit for thee to do. My office authorizeth me in such cases.

Philemon 1:9

Ver. 9. *Yet for love's sake;* writing to thee in a cause of love, where so good and charitable a man may have an opportunity to express his charity. Or rather, out of my love and kindness to thee, persuading me that I need not use my apostolical authority to such a brother and friend, *I beseech thee.*

Being such an one as Paul the aged; being such a one as Paul now much in years, and not like to trouble thee long with any request. Or, Paul the elder by office, one who is thy brother in the ministry.

And now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ; and now a prisoner for Christ's sake, and so cannot personally speak to thee; and I know such is thy piety, that my being a sufferer for the sake of Christ will not render my petition to thee lest acceptable, or to be regarded less.

Philemon 1:10

Ver. 10. *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus;* Onesimus, lately thy servant, (the same mentioned Col 4:9), but my son.

Whom I have begotten in my bonds; not naturally, but spiritually, to whom I have been a spiritual father, and begotten him to Christ in my old age, and while I have been here suffering as a prisoner.

Philemon 1:11

Ver. 11. *Which in time past was to thee unprofitable;* ἀχρηστον he useth a soft word, for it appears, Phm 1:18, he had *wronged* him, taking away some of his goods, and running away with them, without Philemon's knowledge, which made him doubly criminal.

But now profitable to thee and to me; but now ευχρηστον, *profitable*, one that may be profitable to thee, having learned Christ, and to me, who have used him in my service, and whose conversion will add to my crown.

Philemon 1:12

Ver. 12. *Whom I have sent again;* he comes not of his own head, but upon my persuasion, and upon my errand.

Thou therefore receive him; I therefore beseech thee to receive him kindly, and entertain him in thy house.

That is, mine own bowels; whom I love as I love my own soul; thou canst not therefore be unkind to him, but it will reflect upon me.

Philemon 1:13

Ver. 13. I have such an opinion of his sincerity, that I would willingly have kept him with me, that he might, while I am a prisoner for the gospel of Christ, have done those offices for me, which thou wouldst have done hadst thou been here.

Philemon 1:14

Ver. 14. *But without thy mind would I do nothing;* but he was thy servant, and I would not do it without thy knowledge and consent, that it might not be thought that thou hadst done me a kindness necessarily, but that thou

mightest do it freely.

That thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly: which seems to argue that St. Paul expected that he, being reconciled to Onesimus, should send him back to Paul; unless he means the benefit done to Onesimus, in not revenging the wrong he had done him, should not be of necessity, because he was out of his reach, but freely, having him first in his power.

Philemon 1:15

Ver. 15. Onesimus in departing designed no such thing, but possibly God, in the wisdom of his providence, suffered him to depart from thee, and to fall into theft, that he might upon that occasion come to a quicker sense and conviction of sin, and see a need of a Saviour; that, being turned from sin unto God, and having embraced Christ our common Saviour, thou mightest receive, love, and embrace him *αἰώνιον, for ever, this ever, in this life, that is, so long as you both should live.*

Philemon 1:16

Ver. 16. *Not now as a servant;* not now merely as a servant.

But above a servant; but as one that deserveth much more kindness than a servant.

A brother beloved; being a Christian (deservedly to be loved).

Specially to me; especially of me, who have a spiritual relation to him, as the instrument of his conversion, and as he hath been useful in ministering to me in prison.

But how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? But how much more to thee, to whom he stands not only in the relation of a brother, being converted to the Christian faith, but *in the flesh,* as thy kinsman, or thy servant, or one of thy family, or thy countryman, one of the same town and place!

Philemon 1:17

Ver. 17. *If thou count me therefore a partner;* κοινωνον, one with whom thou hast communion, a partner in the same grace of the gospel, and in the same trials and afflictions of the gospel.

Receive him as myself; do not only forgive him, but kindly entertain him, who is my friend, as thou wouldst do myself.

Philemon 1:18

Ver. 18. If he hath any way been unfaithful. If he hath taken any thing from thee, or be in thy debt, charge that upon me, let me be accountable to thee for it.

Philemon 1:19

Ver. 19. Thou hast it here under my hand, I take upon me to satisfy thee Onesimus's debt; yet I could tell thee, that thou owest me more than it can be, even thy own self, God having made use of me as an instrument to convert and turn thee unto God. Such persons are great debtors to their spiritual fathers, Ro 15:27.

Philemon 1:20

Ver. 20. *Yea, brother:* the particle ναί is used in swearing, affirming, persuading, entreating, the latter seemeth here most proper; as much as, of all love, brother.

Let me have joy of thee in the Lord; it will rejoice my heart to see thee charitable and obedient to my monitions, let me have a spiritual joy from thy satisfying of me in what I desire.

Refresh my bowels in the Lord; either Onesimus, whom he had called his

bowels, Phm 1:12; or, my inward man.

Philemon 1:21

Ver. 21. I have not written this without a confidence that thou in this thing wilt do what I desire of thee, but I write it out of my affection to poor Onesimus, and desire to help him, not doubting of thy readiness to do the thing.

Philemon 1:22

Ver. 22. This would incline one to think that this Epistle was written before the Second Epistle to Timothy, for there, 2Ti 4:6-8, he seems to have other apprehensions; yet it is plain Timothy was with Paul when he wrote this, which he was not when that Second Epistle was written, as appears from 2Ti 4:9,21. Here, upon a confidence that through the help of the church's prayers he should again come to them, he writeth to Philemon to prepare him a lodging.

Philemon 1:23

Ver. 23. We read of this *Epaphras*, Col 1:7, where he is called Paul's *fellow servant*, and a *faithful minister of Christ*: he was with Paul at Rome, Col 4:12, but there is no mention of him as a prisoner; but now he was a *fellow prisoner* with Paul, either in the same place, or upon the same account.

Philemon 1:24

Ver. 24. All ministers of the gospel: they are also named, Col 4:10,12,14: they were all at this time at Rome with Paul: see Ac 12:12,25 15:37,39 19:29 20:4 27:2 2Ti 4:10.

Philemon 1:25

Ver. 25. See Poole on "Ga 6:18". See Poole on "Ro 16:24". See Poole on "1Co 16:23". See Poole on "Php 4:23". See Poole on "2Th 3:18".

With your spirit is the same as with you. By *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, he means the Spirit of Christ in all its gracious emanations: we have his meaning fully, 2Co 13:14: *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.* Amen is a particle of praying and affirming, by which he declareth his earnest desire it might be so, and also his faith that it should be so. Nor doth he pray for Philemon alone, (though the Epistle chiefly concerned him), but for all those who at Colosse had with him obtained like precious faith.

Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.