# The book of Philemon

**Introduction**

The epistle of Philemon is Paul’s smallest epistle, and it is one of his most interesting, as we find no doctrine being taught in its pages.

This epistle is actually an epistle encouraging Philemon to do exactly what the dispensation of grace is all about. God wants Philemon to show the same grace to Onesimus, that God showed to Philemon when he saved him, by forgiving Onesimus.

I believe that this epistle, which appears in the bible as the last of the Pauline epistles is placed last because it is also a picture of the catching away of the body of Christ (the Church) a.k.a. the rapture.

We are like Onesimus in this epistle, unprofitable to our Master, until we trust the gospel of the grace of God found in 1st Corinthians 15:1-4, and we then experience the forgiveness of our sins, and it changes us.

We become a part of the body of Christ the moment we believe, and immediately after the last member of the body of Christ is added to the body, God will then take us home to be with the head of the body.

That is why God has the epistle placed at the end of the epistles of Paul, because it is in the Pauline epistles alone that the body of Christ finds our marching orders for the dispensation of grace.

This dispensation was a mystery hid in God from before the foundation of the world and were not made known unto us until God raised up the apostle of the Gentiles and gave him all the mysteries found only in his epistles.

**1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,**

**Paul:** The first word in all of Paul’s Epistles is his name. He was originally introduced to us in the seventh chapter of the book of Acts as Saul, as he was persecuting the Church.

***Acts 7:57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.***

***1st Timothy 1:12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; 13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.***

  In the first verse of nine of Paul’s epistles he tells his readers that he is an apostle, but in this one he is talking to a friend who knows that he is the apostle of the Gentiles, but he may not have heard that Paul was a prisoner yet.

**A prisoner of Jesus:** God wanted Paul to witness to the world's leaders, and the best way he could do that at times was to have him arrested.

***2nd Timothy 2:8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: 9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.***

***Ephesians 3:1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,***

***Philippians 1:12 says, But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; 13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;***

Paul said that his bonds were manifest in all the palace, and in all other places, because God called him to reach the Gentiles in all places. Even in Caesar’s household many had come to Christ. Philippians 4:22.

**Christ:** The anointed one. It is the same word translated as the Messiah in the old testament. Oil was poured on priests to anoint them when they began their ministry at thirty. Acts 10:38

Jesus was anointed by God at his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon him. and Jesus was Israel's High Priest and King. Kings were also anointed.

***Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,***

***Acts 10:38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.***

**Timothy:** Timotheus. Paul mentions that Timothy was with him. He was visiting Paul while he was in jail, not as a cellmate.

**Philemon:** He was a wealthy man with many servants that had helped Paul during his earlier days.

**Dearly beloved:** A term that is used only of one other person in the bible, Timothy. Philemon had the same spirit as Timothy did.

**Fellowlabourer:** He was one in a small group that Paul had called his fellow-laborers, which included Timothy, Luke, Priscilla, Aquilla, Aphroditus, and Titus.

**2 And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:**

Apphia was Philemon's wife, and Archippus was his son. Archippus and Epaphroditus are the only two people mentioned as fellow soldiers with Paul.

***Philippians 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labor, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.***

**The church in thy house:** Philemon was probably not the pastor of the church that met in his house, Archippus most likely was, based on a comment made in Colossians concerning him:

***Colossians 4:17******And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.***

**3 Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Prior to the dispensation of grace being ushered in with the saving of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, lost mankind had two things to dread for their rejection of Christ, and they were wrath and destruction. Psalm 2:1-7 and Psalm 110:1-6.

But Paul tells us in the Body of Christ, “Grace and Peace?” Why? Paul uses this at the beginning of each of his epistles as a statement that is never used by anyone before him, or after him in scripture.

What about Peter, and John, don’t they say grace and peace? Yes, twice each, but nothing like Paul:

***1st Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,***

***2nd Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,***

***2nd John 1:3 Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.***

***Revelation 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;***

God the Father is not mentioned here in Revelation 1:4. Notice they never end with the same ending: From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Grace to you, and peace:** The two primary things that we have received from God in this present dispensation. They are not given to us by Paul, but by God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace is the way by which we receive salvation today, and peace means the cessation of hostilities from God toward us. God is no longer at war with us because our sin has been atoned for by his Son on the cross.

***Ephesians 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:***

***Colossians 1:20 says, And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.*** *Ephesians 2:14.*

There is coming a day when grace and peace will no longer be the case, but judgment and war will be the message to the world during the tribulation period.

**From God the Father:**Grace and peace come from God the Father.

**And the Lord Jesus Christ:** Grace and peace come also from the Lord Jesus Christ. The title of Lord placed before Jesus’ name signifies what he is to us. Lord means master, and he is the one who is to have dominion over us.

He has been invested with the authority to judge those who reject his Lordship; and one day he will judge the world. Paul is speaking here:

***1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,***

***Colossians 1:20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. 21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight:***

**4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,**

**I thank my God:** This is a saying that is used five times in scripture, and all five are used by the apostle Paul,

***Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.***

***1 Corinthians 1:4 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;***

***1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:***

***Philippians 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,***

Paul is also the only person to say, I thank God 3 times.

***Romans 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.***

***1 Corinthians 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius;***

***2 Timothy 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;***

**5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;**

Since Philemon had love towards all saints, he should also love his fellow servant Onesimus who was with Paul in prison. Onesimus told Paul of Philemon's faith after Paul led him to the Lord.

Philemon then should also love Onesimus and welcome him back, forgiving him. To truly love the Lord Jesus, we must love God's people. Love is an action, not a feeling.

**6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.**

**The communication of thy faith:** Philemon’s testimony would be less effective if he held back some good thing that he should have done which would testify of Christ's love in him to others, namely forgiving Onesimus.

If Philemon were to forgive his servant Onesimus, that act would open up areas of ministry to many people in Philemon's life. That's the doctrine of grace in action.

**May become effectual:** The communication of Philemon’s faith would become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which was in him.

It would have a more powerful effect on others if he showed grace in this area with Onesimus. The lost would recognize that Philemon's forgiveness was from God, and he would be more effectual in reaching them with the gospel.

**Every good thing:** The acknowledging of every good thing would be Philemon taking advantage of everything Christ has done for him, and that Paul had taught him.

Philemon had been forgiven by God, but if he were holding a grudge against Onesimus it would make him less effectual in every good thing.

**In Christ Jesus:** We are placed into Christ the moment we trust the gospel of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection for us. 1st Corinthians 15:1-4.

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

**We have great joy and consolation in thy love:**Paul and Timothy couldn’t be there, but knowing Philemon was there he knew the saints were being refreshed by Philemon.

**The bowels of the saints:** The word bowels can mean a person’s inner parts, as in Judas’ bowels gushing out, or it can refer to a person’s inner most being, as it is meant here.

Paul uses this in three separate verses in this book. Philemon refreshed the saints with the word of God, with his finances, but more importantly with his spiritual gifts as a fellowlabourer with Paul, and Timothy in the gospel.

**8 Wherefore, though I might be much more 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.**

**To enjoin thee:** To command him.

**Beseech thee:** Paul shows grace by pleading with Philemon, rather than boldly ordering him to do this as the apostle of the Gentiles. He uses the perfect example of grace, which should motivate all who know Christ.

**10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:**

**I have begotten in my bonds:** Paul led Onesimus to the Lord in prison.

It is not clear whether Onesimus was a prisoner as well, or whether he came to see Paul, the friend of his former employer in prison. Notice that the relationship between the two of them was of that of a Father and a son.

**11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and me:**

Onesimus was obviously not profitable to Philemon when he ran away. We were once unprofitable to God when we were running from him, but he loved us anyway.

***Romans 5:8 says, But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.***

**12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:**

**Receive him:** Paul doesn't ask, he expected Philemon to receive Onesimus back as though he were receiving Paul himself, or as Paul’s son.

Paul was in a position of authority over Philemon because of his position as the apostle of the Gentiles, but we see him begging Philemon at the same time for Philemon’s sake, more than for his, or even Onesimus’ sake.

**Mine own bowels:**This is a reference to Paul having begotten Onesimus in the faith when he shared the gospel with him.

Roman law said that you had to return a runaway slave, but the law of Moses said that you were not to return a runaway slave. Why did Paul send Onesimus, a runaway servant, back to Philemon, his Master? Does God (or did God) condone slavery?

Indebted servitude in Israel was vastly different from slavery. The scripture clearly denounces the stealing of men (kidnapping) for the purpose of enslaving them.

It did condone indebted servitude of another Jew who could no longer pay his debts. Strict requirements were also enforced by God in the law of Moses. The indebted servitude that God ordained was a method used for regaining a lost inheritance for a Jew.

**13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:**

**In thy stead he might have ministered unto me:** Philemon couldn't be there to serve God with Paul, but Paul would not keep Onesimus there with him unless Philemon gave his approval.

Philemon would be happy to know that Paul now thought so much of Onesimus that he would have allowed him to be his personal helper. Something that Philemon once assisted Paul with, in the past.

**In the bonds of the gospel:**Because the gospel was diametrically opposed to the world’s system, the world would seek to arrest the gospel, by apprehending the preachers of it. Philippians 3:12.

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

**Without thy mind:** Paul wanted Philemon to willingly give his servant to him knowing that his gift would be rewarded at the judgment seat. Paul is referring to the benefit of everything that Philemon would receive by loaning Onesimus to Paul.

**Necessity, but willingly:** Paul wanted Philemon to forgive Onesimus and willingly loan him to Paul for the ministry, not because Paul ordered it.

**15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;**

How does Philemon get to receive Onesimus forever? By his Salvation! Onesimus ran away from Philemon, but Paul led him to the Lord. Was that just another coincidence?

Perhaps Paul and Onesimus were put into the same cell together because they spoke the same language, or because they were from the same region. I believe it was God's plan.

Paul could very likely have known Onesimus since Paul and Onesimus' master had served the Lord together. After Onesimus was saved he wanted to do what was right. Paul advised him to return to Philemon in order to repay his debt.

**16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh,** **and in the Lord?**

How could Philemon receive Onesimus back as if nothing had ever happened? It is only by the peace of God which passeth all understanding that Philemon could show that kind of forgiveness to someone who had done him wrong. Philippians 4:7.

**A Brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord:** Onesimus was mostly likely related to Philemon, probably a brother.

This would explain why he was a servant to Philemon who was trying to pay off debts, that Philemon would have taken to redeem his brother as his kinsman redeemer. Ruth 2-4.

**17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.**

Onesimus was Paul's partner, just as Paul was Philemon's partner once, and fellowlabourer, in the ministry.

That endeared Paul to Philemon greatly. Paul appeals to that friendship, and he asks his friend to accept his runaway servant in the same way that he accepts Paul as a partner.

Imagine the peace that would permeate Philemon's house as he and Onesimus served the Lord together.

We were once at war with God, but we have been made nigh to God by the blood of Christ. We now have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul appealed to Philemon on these grounds.

**18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;**

We today have wronged God and he put that on Christ's account, and the debt was paid in full. Onesimus is a picture of us, indebted to God with a debt we could never repay.

We were slaves to sin, but he purchased us. He put our debt on his account because we were bankrupt and unable to pay. Romans 5:8.

***Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.***

**Ought:** The word means anything.

**19 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.**

Paul mentions that he wrote this part of the epistle himself, and he says to Philemon that he could mention to Philemon that he owed Paul.

This is probably a reference to the debt Philemon owed Paul for leading him to Christ. He brings this up, so that Philemon will fulfill his request for the right reasons. It would be far better for Philemon to honor Paul's request as a service to God.

Could Philemon's forgiveness of a limited earthly debt even come close to the unlimited eternal debt that Philemon owed to God, or Paul for telling him how to be saved? Of course not!

**20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.**

**Refresh my bowels in the Lord:** How could Philemon refresh Paul's heart (bowels)?

   By forgiving Onesimus, by receiving him as a brother in the Lord, and by sending him back to minister to Paul while he remained in prison.

Paul was not telling Philemon to be gracious to Onesimus, he was beseeching him to.

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

As believers under grace, we should be accustomed to doing more than what was required under the law.

Paul just expects Philemon to do the right thing and to go above and beyond what is expected. Isn't that how we show God's love to this lost and dying world?

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

Paul believed that through the prayers of the saints he would be delivered from his arrest in Rome. Acts 28. He was released for almost two years. This is just a practical illustration of the doctrine of grace that Paul revealed.

Notice that of all the places that Paul could have chosen to go once he was released, he chose the household of his dear friend Philemon, who lived in the area of Colosse.

**23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; 24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.**

**Salute thee Epaphras:** Say hi to Epaphras. Colossians 1:7.

Epaphras was a shortened version of the name Epaphroditus, which is the name for the Greek goddess of love Aphrodite, it literally means a slave of Aphrodite.

Epaphras means love. Epaphroditus’ name glorified a pagan goddess, so he later shortened it to Epaphras.

**My fellowprisoner:** Epaphras was in jailed briefly for preaching the gospel.

**Marcus:** This is John Mark, who departed from Paul in Acts 13, but as we can see here, he is now profitable to Paul, and to God. Lucas is Luke, the author of the gospel of Luke, and the book of Acts.

**Aristarchus:**He was from Thessalonica. Acts 19:29.

**Demas:** He is mentioned here, but it is not long before he forsakes Paul, and God, for the love of the world.

***2 Timothy 4:10 says, For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.***

**Lucas:** This is Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, and the gospel of Luke. Remember it is only a few short years between the writing of the prison epistles, and Paul's pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus.

**25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ:** This exact phrase, or one almost exactly the same is found at the end of all of Paul’s epistle, which all start out with grace as well.

The theme of the letter to Philemon is about showing grace to those we have taught it to so that we might be more effective in our ministry.

**The End**

Philemon is the last epistle of Paul in the bible, which ends the special revelations dispensed to Paul from the risen Christ that are specifically for the body of Christ today (A.K.A. The Church).

The interruption of Israel’s prophecy program is over, and the time of Jacob’s trouble can soon begin. See Jeremiah 30:7

**Philemon Test**

**1. Write out the verse that Paul tells us is his token of proof as to his authorship in all of his epistles and tell what that one word is that Paul uses to identify himself as the author and where the one word is found in each of his epistles.**

**2. Why was Saul of Tarsus also given the Gentile name of Paul?**

**3. How did Paul receive Roman citizenship?**

**4. Why did Paul call himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ?**

**5. Why didn't Paul claim to be an Apostle in this Epistle?**

**6. Who is the only other person is scripture that Paul calls "dearly beloved?**

**7. What is the difference between a fellow labourer and a fellow soldier?**

**8. Where did the Church that Philemon most likely pastored meeting?**

**9. What does Paul mean when he says "Grace and Peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ"?**

**10. What two men in scripture are mentioned as being fellow soldiers with Paul?**

**11. What does the words "Lord" and "Christ" both mean?**

**12. What will happen when the age of Grace and Peace are over after the Rapture?**

**13. What former cellmate of Paul probably told him of Philemon's love and faith?**

**14. How could Philemon "communicate" his faith more effectually according to Paul?**

**15. Instead of Paul telling Philemon to forgive Onesimus what does he do to show grace?**

**16. Who led Onesimus to the Lord?**

**17. What does Onesimus' name mean?**

**18. How did Paul want Philemon to treat Onesimus when he returned unto him?**

**19. Does God's word condone slavery as was practiced in the United States in its early days?**

**20. What was it called when a person sold himself to pay off his debts in the Bible?**

**21. Did Paul want Onesimus to stay with him? Explain briefly your answer.**

**22. What did Paul suggest was the benefit to Philemon forgiving Onesimus?**

**23. In what two ways did Paul want Philemon to receive Onesimus when he returned?**

**24. What did Paul expect would be Philemon's response to his requests?**

**25. Who actually wrote and delivered this epistle to Philemon for Paul?**

**26. How does Paul show the difference of Law vs Grace towards Philemon in this letter?**