

A Study of Paul's Letter to Philemon
Christ Lutheran Church
Summer, 2022

I. Some Background on the Letter

A. Author – Paul

B. Date – about AD 62 (one of Paul's _____ Epistles)

C. Form

1. The Epistles present a different _____ in telling God's story and plan
2. Prior to the Epistles, God used law, history, poetry, prophecy, and the Gospels
3. But in the Epistles He adopted a more _____ and direct method
 - a. He looks back to the _____ and
 - b. talks about the _____
4. Someone once said that the Epistles are the love letters of Christ to us. Two classifications of "Epistles":
 - a. The Epistles are _____ – directed to a church body, a group of people, meant to be shared among the churches
 - b. Letters are more _____ and individual. Perhaps not meant to be as broadly shared
 - c. Under this division, the Epistle of Philemon would be classified as a letter, for it is individual and intimate
 - d. Some commentators believe there is reason to believe that Paul did not expect its contents to be divulged
 - e. This does not detract from the inspiration and _____ of Philemon, but rather enhances its value and message

D. The Historical Backdrop

1. The story behind the Epistle to Philemon was played out within the context of Roman slavery

2. There were approximately _____ million slaves in the Roman Empire, where the total population did not exceed 120 million
3. A slave was a chattel (“animated property”)
 - a. He was treated worse than an _____, and
 - b. He was subject to the whim of his _____
4. Many Roman slaves could advance to positions of great _____ and authority within their master’s homes
5. Many think Onesimus was such a slave, since he had access to his master’s money that funded his flight to Rome

E. A Brief Reconstruction of the Story

1. Onesimus was a slave belonging to Philemon, a Christian of Colosse
2. He had opportunity to _____ and seized on it
3. He made his way to _____ where he expected his identity and past life to be “erased” within the great city
4. One day he chanced upon a gathering where Paul was _____
5. There he heard the _____ of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit established a saving faith within him
6. He told his story to Paul, and Paul sent him back to Philemon with this accompanying letter

II. The Purpose of the Letter

- A. The primary purpose of this epistle is to reveal Christ’s _____ for us in what He did for us before God in pleading our case
- B. This is the finest illustration of substitution: Read Philemon 18
 1. In Paul’s words, we can hear Christ _____ to take our place and to have all our sin imputed to Him — Read 2 Corinthians 5:21
 2. He took our place in _____, but He gives us His place in _____: Read (Philemon 17)
 3. We have the standing of Christ before God, or we have _____ at all
 - a. He took our _____, and He gives us His _____

- b. “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”
(see 2 Corinthians 5:21)
 - 4. Onesimus, an unprofitable runaway slave, was to be received _____
as Paul, the great apostle, would have been received in the home of
Philemon
- C. The practical purpose of this letter is to teach _____ love
 - 1. Paul spoke of the new _____ between “master” and
“servant” in the other Prison Epistles
 - 2. Here he demonstrates how it should work
 - a. These men, belonging to two different _____ in the
Roman Empire, hating each other and hurting each other, are now
brothers in Christ
 - b. And they are to _____ like it
 - c. This is the only solution to the “problem” of capital and labor

III. General Outline of the Letter

- A. Genial greeting to Philemon and his family, vv. 1-3
- B. Good reputation of Philemon, vv. 4-7
- C. Gracious plea for Onesimus, vv. 8-16
- D. “Guiltless” substitutes for “guilty”, v. 17
- E. Glorious illustration of imputation, v. 18
- F. General and personal items and requests, vv. 19-25

IV. Proceeding Through the Letter

- A. Genial greeting to Philemon and his family, vv. 1-3
 - 1. V. 1— “A _____ of Jesus Christ”
 - a. later, Paul makes his plea to Philemon on the basis that he is a
prisoner (v. 9)
 - b. He was not in prison because of the _____ of the
Jerusalem religious leaders or the power of Roman officials

- c. He was in prison because Jesus Christ _____ it and would work through it
- d. Note that Timothy is with Paul
- e. “Fellow-worker”—Philemon is not only dearly beloved, but is associated with Paul and Timothy in proclaiming the gospel
 - 1.) he was an honorable man, willing to face the _____ being a Christian would bring
 - 2.) he was probably a man of _____ means as well
- 2. V. 2 — “Apphia” is the wife of Philemon. “Archippus” is the son of Philemon
 - a. He is a young man who is a fellow soldier, enduring hardship for the gospel
 - b. “Church (Ekklesia) in your house”—
 - 1.) this word describes the _____, not a building
 - 2.) there were no church buildings in the apostolic period
 - 3.) The “church” assembled in _____
- 3. V. 3—This is the usual greeting of Paul (see other Prison Epistles).

B. Good reputation of Philemon, vv. 4-7

- 1. V. 4—Paul had made Philemon a subject of _____. This would seem to denote a special and close relationship between them
- 2. V. 5—Philemon had a good reputation as a _____
 - a. His “_____” was toward the Lord Jesus and toward the other believers.
 - b. His “_____” was toward the Lord Jesus, and he was faithful to other believers.
- 3. V. 6—The life of Philemon was a _____ - Read Philippians 2:13
- 4. V. 7—Paul had joy and consolation in the love of Philemon for other believers
 - a. “hearts” implies the entire psychological nature

- b. It means that because of his efforts the _____ life of the believers had great satisfaction

C. Gracious plea for Onesimus, vv. 8-16

1. V. 8—Paul now comes to the purpose of the letter and approaches his subject diplomatically and cautiously
2. V. 9—Paul gives three reasons as the basis for his plea:
 - a. “For _____ sake”—probably Philemon’s love for Paul
 - b. “Paul, the aged”—though Paul is not too old in years, his _____ and persecution as a missionary for Christ have aged him
 - c. He is a prisoner of Jesus Christ, in bonds in Rome, and could not come in person (see v. 1)
3. V. 10— the name “Onesimus” means _____ (useful)
4. V. 11 — “Unprofitable” (not useful) — Paul is making a play on words here
 - a. “Profitable” (v. 10) was once unprofitable; but now that he is a believer, he is profitable
 - b. He is now truly Onesimus—profitable (useful) to both _____ and Paul
 - c. This is a subtle _____ that while in prison Paul could still use him
5. V. 12—But Paul is returning him to Philemon
6. V. 13—Paul very candidly speaks his mind. This is very _____. Perhaps Paul did not intend us to read it
7. V. 14—Again he makes a subtle suggestion:
 - a. Philemon could return Onesimus to him to minister to him in prison
 - b. Did Philemon send him back to Paul? We don’t know
8. VV. 15, 16—Since Onesimus has become a _____, his status and relationship to Philemon are different
 - a. He is still a _____ according to the Roman law, but he is more than that—he is a beloved brother

- b. He is now really profitable. He can live up to his _____ for the first time

D. Guiltless substitutes for guilty, v. 17

1. This is one of the grandest illustrations of plenary _____ and imputation
2. Behind Paul's plea is _____ plea to the Father on behalf of the sinner who trusts Christ as the Savior. That sinner is received on the same standing that Christ is received
3. In other words, the saved sinner has as much _____ in heaven as Christ has, for he has His right — "accepted in the Beloved" (see Ephesians 1:6)

E. Glorious illustration of imputation, v. 18

1. The reason the saved sinner is _____ in heaven is that Christ took his place down here
2. The sins of the sinner were put on Christ, and He paid the _____

F. General and personal items and requests, vv. 19-25

1. V. 19—Paul agrees to pay the entire _____ of Onesimus
 - a. Philemon is to receive him as he would receive _____
 - b. "I will repay it" (see Hebrews 10:5-10)
2. V. 20—Paul pleads for Onesimus
3. V. 21—Paul feels that Philemon will do _____ than he requests
4. V. 22—Paul expects to be released from prison. He requests prayer in that direction
5. VV. 23-25—These are personal greetings to mutual friends