

Philemon 1-7 Devotion

by Will Groben

Day 1

- † Read Philemon 1-25. On a sheet of paper, write down what you think is important about this letter. Also write down any questions you have at this point or anything you did not understand when you were reading.
- † Consider these study notes:
 - A. Timothy's name means "Honoring God." He is listed as the co-author with Paul, probably writing this letter by hand. He had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. He was led to Christ in Lystra by Paul, during the first missionary journey, and mentored by him. He went with Paul and Silas on the other two missionary journeys. Despite his youth, he was Paul's special representative to various churches, such as in Corinth and Ephesus.
 - B. Philemon's name means "One who kisses." He was considered a "fellow worker" in ministry, which is the same title given to Paul's companions later in the letter. He hosted a church in his house [there were no church buildings for Christians back then]. He trusted the Lord, had love for God's people, was generous and kind. He was Paul's friend, came to Christ through Paul's work, and probably was mentored by Paul. He was a wealthy land owner who owned slaves, including Onesimus, and lived in Colosse.
 - C. Apphia's name means "Fruitful." She was a sister in the cause; possibly Philemon's wife. Archippus' name means "Master of the horse." He was a fellow soldier of the cross; probably an elder or pastor in the Colossian church.

Day 2

- † Read Philemon 1-25. As you read, write down what you can learn about Paul from this letter.
[You will be better blessed in developing your study skills by giving that a try for yourself, but if you will not do it, here are some observations to consider: Paul was in prison/chains for preaching the good news, was an "old man" at that point, had led Philemon to Christ, gained much joy and comfort from Philemon's love, hoped to see Philemon again, led Onesimus to Christ while in prison, wanted to keep Onesimus with him, was sending Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter, was willing to pay for any harm Onesimus had caused Philemon, and was hopeful God would use this letter to touch Philemon's heart and bless all involved.]
- † Consider these study notes: Paul's name means "Little." It is not clear whether this was his given Roman name [his Jewish name was Saul] or whether he took it after his conversion for some reason. He was a Roman citizen, born in Tarsus, though of the tribe of Benjamin. He was a Pharisee before coming to Christ. He was a willing witness to Stephen's murder, the first martyrdom recorded in Acts. He pursued a frenzied persecution of Christians. While on the road going to Damascus to capture Christians, Christ spoke to him from Heaven. He was mentored by Barnabas with whom he worked first in Antioch. He went on three missionary journeys to the Gentile world throughout the Roman Empire. He was an apostle and missionary, who founded churches throughout Greece, Turkey, and the Middle East. He wrote many of the Epistles in the New Testament. He wrote this letter in about AD60, while in prison. About this time, he also wrote the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians.

Day 3

- † The word δοῦλος [DOO- luhs] – meaning slave – is used 120 times in the New Testament. When Jude identified himself, it was as a δοῦλος [a slave] of Christ [Jude 1:1]. Peter identified himself as a slave of Christ [2 Peter 1:1], as did James [James 1:1] and John [Rev. 1:1]. Jesus' mother, Mary, identified herself as the slave of the Lord [Luke 1:38]. Interestingly, in this letter that deals with the issue of slavery, Paul did not call himself "a slave of Christ Jesus," as he did in his letters to the Romans, the Philippians, the

Galatians, and Titus. Paul was a free man, even a Roman citizen, which most Jews were not. He had also gone from being a powerful man among the Jewish hierarchy to being one of the most influential people in the new Christian movement. Imagine the shock of the Roman readers at Paul's introduction of himself to them as a "slave" of Christ!

- † Read Romans 6:16-19. Are there ways in which you are still acting like a slave to sin? For example, are there sin issues you cannot seem to control or is your attitude toward sin one of tolerance? This might be a good time for some prayerful confession and repentance. If you are intolerant about sin in your life but are still struggling, find an accountability partner, talk with your small group leader, or consider trying a small group especially focused recovery from on those issues.

Day 4

- † Read Philemon 1-7. Paul called himself "a prisoner of Christ Jesus." This was a "double entendre," a saying with two meanings. First, as he mentioned in v.13, he was in prison because of his preaching of the gospel. Second, he was a "captive" of Christ, bound to Christ, even as a slave [as discussed yesterday].
- † Read Mark 10:42-45 and Philippians 2:5-8. What does it look like to be a slave of righteousness or a slave of Christ? In what ways do you measure up to this portrayal and in what ways to you fall short? What should you do about changing your attitudes or actions to better represent yourself as a slave of righteousness and Christ instead of as a slave of sin and death?

Day 5

- † Consider these study notes: The Bible does not condemn slavery; it accepts it as a part of life in those times. During that time in history, in that cultural area, slavery was quite common. When a battle was fought, the losers became slaves to the winners; this was common in all people groups in that area. One thing that set the Israelites apart was that they would not make slaves of their own people. There is nothing in the Bible that says slavery is part of God's ideal or that God forbids it. However, the Bible clearly teaches about how God would have us treat other people [as we want to be treated, with love and compassion, serving them...]. Even in the Old Testament, it is remarkable that God provided the Israelites with a legal code that specified the conditions for freeing slaves, such as if they were mistreated. In the New Testament, we are told we were all slaves to sin who must now become slaves to Christ to be free of sin; and the emphasis of Jesus' message so far as it touches human slavery was again that we should treat everyone right and that no matter what our situation [including if we found ourselves to be slaves], we should be doing all we could for Christ and others. We are all called to serve and to humble ourselves, and our freedom is spiritual. But that freedom brought slaves and slave holders to the same level in Christ's kingdom, which was a revolutionary thought at the time.
- † Read Philemon 1-7 again. Note verse 6. Some translations seem to reverse the cause and effect of this sentence, but it literally means that, as Philemon gained a better understanding of Christ and Christ's work in him, he would become even more capable and active than he already was in sharing the blessings of Christ with others. Throughout this letter, Paul was calling Philemon to step up to the next rung on the ladder of spiritual maturity. Paul praised the spirituality Philemon already had, reminded Philemon of the more advanced service Paul himself was giving Christ, and then subtly urged Philemon to allow the Holy Spirit to work in his heart to further bring him knowledge of Christ and thus a change in his heart, spiritual growth. These thoughts apply to us today as well. To be transformed into Christ-likeness, to effectively become a slave of Christ and be free of sin, we must come to know Christ better. This involves both gaining knowledge from study of the Bible and gaining intimacy from experiencing Christ's love and presence through walking in faith, praying, and serving.
- † What is your next step to know Christ better? In what way will you have to reorganize your schedule, priorities, or habits to make that happen?

Philemon 8-14 Devotion

by Will Groben

Day 1

- † Read Philemon 1-14. Though it does not appear in this letter, the Greek word for “disciple” is used 252 times in the New Testament. A disciple to a Rabbi was a student devoted to the Rabbi’s teachings, so much so that he would even imitate his gestures. This was the term applied to all the *true followers* of Jesus, not just the apostles. However, it was *not* applied to the crowds who exclaimed praise for Jesus in an emotional moment but then turned their attention to other people and other things. Paul reminds us in this letter of his devotion to Jesus: he not only was willing to go to prison for preaching the gospel, but continued to preach the gospel while in prison. In this letter to Philemon, we see in v.10 that Paul has led Onesimus to Christ while still in prison. Think about this for a moment. If you were threatened with arrest for doing your ministry work, would you continue? If you were arrested, would you be focused on continuing to minister to others in prison or would you be more focused on your own problems? Paul’s actions are an amazing testament to his devotion to, and faith in, Christ.
- † We become disciples of Christ because of what Christ has done for us in setting us free from slavery to sin and death, and transforming us into slaves of righteousness. Not all of us are called to suffer for Christ by going to prison. However, the question for us remains whether we are *true disciples* of Jesus. How close are you to Jesus really? How well do you know and understand what he calls us to do or how he calls us to live [as explained in the New Testament]? How devotedly do you follow these principles and instructions? Is it time to improve on this?

Day 2

- † Read Philemon 8-11. We see in v.19 that Paul led Philemon to Christ at some point in the past. No doubt, Paul provided some mentoring to Philemon at that time, perhaps while both were in Ephesus [though that is unclear]. This relationship, combined with Paul’s position as a recognized leader in the ministry, Paul’s superior suffering for Christ, and Paul’s assurance that he is acting in God’s will, led Paul to say in v.8 that he could “order” Philemon to do what was right. That suggests an amazing amount of authority for Paul and respect by Philemon! Instead of ordering Philemon, Paul “appeals” to him. This suggests a great deal of mutual respect and affection between Paul and Philemon. Surely Paul knew that what he was asking of Philemon was culturally outrageous, legally unbinding, and personally uncomfortable and sacrificial for Philemon.
- † Even though there was no official church structure connecting the house churches in that day, men like Paul, John, James, and Peter were recognized leaders over all congregations. There were lesser influences, both men and women, who also ministered broadly. These people commanded respect – not because of position of title or job – but because of their position relative to Christ: these people were totally committed to Christ, intimate with Christ, and reflecting the nature of Christ. How much respect do you show toward the people like that in your church? How open are you to applying the biblical teaching you hear from those people, even when it is uncomfortable? If you are hesitant to submit to their “orders” or “appeals,” what does that say about either your heart for discipleship or your respect for those who are leaders in your church [pastors, elders, small group leaders, mentors, ministry leaders, et cetera]? Is there anything you need to do about this to better reflect a true discipleship attitude?

Day 3

- † Read Philemon 10-14. Onesimus became a believer as a result of Paul’s ministry. He served Paul well after that and earned Paul’s love. He was owned by Philemon, had not been a good slave in the past, and then had run away. Most likely, he was frightened of going back to the owner from whom he had run away, but

hopeful that a change in situation might occur because of the letter he carried. There is a play on words in v.11, because Onesimus' name means "useful." So Paul is literally saying, "I appeal to you for my child Useful... who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me."

- † Onesimus was useless as a human slave, but now he was useful as a slave of Christ! Look at v.13: after accepting Christ, Onesimus was ministering to Paul in prison. When legally bound, he fled; but when a free escapee, he chose to serve. Why, why did Onesimus have such a change in attitude? Has the same thing happened for you? Has your heart changed? Are you now ministering, making yourself useful to the body of Christ? If not, why not? If so, are your level of commitment and ways you are serving in line with God's will for you at this time?

Day 4

- † Read Philemon 8-14. Paul had a strong desire to see Philemon do what Paul knew was right, but Paul didn't want to compel Philemon to do it, rather he wanted Philemon to do it of his own free will. We have been given a great freedom in Christ, yet with that freedom comes great responsibility. Because Christ set us free from slavery to sin to become slaves to righteousness, we become his disciples and grow to reflect his image, which was our created purpose and the object of our salvation. We are ambassadors for Christ, his witnesses, his ministers.
- † How proactive are you in doing the things Christ did, in following him in the positive ways: doing evangelism? teaching others about the scriptures? encouraging people in their faith? building healthy relationships? meeting the needs of other people? focusing your resources, not on self-indulgence, but on furthering the interests of God's kingdom? What action steps can you take to better follow Christ?

Day 5

- † Read Matthew 28:18-20: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them [the core eleven disciples], saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'" Jesus gave the command to his disciples to go and make more disciples. Why would he do that?
- † Jesus said to Go! This is not passive, it is putting yourself at risk. Jesus said to make disciples everywhere! This means even in the places that are dark and dangerous. Making disciples involved two parts: baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, in other words evangelism; and teaching them to observe all of Jesus' commands, in other words edification to the point that they also now could make disciples.
- † If those disciples were to make new disciples who would then make more disciples, do you see any reason this process should stop? Do you think this command is for Jesus' true disciples today? Can the spread of the gospel and the work of the church be accomplished if disciples are not making more disciples? How does this apply to you?
- † Jesus bracketed his command with two assurances: all authority has been given to him in Heaven and on Earth; and he will be with us always. How can this assure, empower, and comfort us as we do his work?
- † What does discipleship to Christ look like today? How can we accomplish making "multiplying" disciples in our church? Are you ready to be involved, to get equipped to make disciples and to start doing so? Do you have people in your life whom you can emulate – mentors in a sense – like Philemon and Onesimus had Paul?

Philemon 15-25 Devotion

by Will Groben

Day 1

- † Read Philemon 1-25. As you read, note how each verse builds Paul's argument, lending weight to his credibility, being persuasive, or building his case.
- † What would be your reaction to receiving this letter? Would it be swayed any by the witness Onesimus could give of God's grace working in him? Would you be ready to forgive and forget, to do what Paul is asking?

Day 2

- † Read Philemon 18-19. Paul's intercession for Onesimus illustrates what Christ has done for us when we were slaves to sin. As Onesimus was reconciled to Philemon, so we are reconciled to God through Christ. As Paul offered to pay the debts of a slave, so Christ paid our debt of sin. Like Onesimus, we must return to God our Master and serve him.
- † Reflect for a few moments on the grace God has extended to you through Christ's sacrifice on the cross: forgiveness for your sins, reconciliation with God, adoption into God's family, regeneration into new life, brotherhood or sisterhood in Christ, baptism into the body of Christ [the church], citizenship in Heaven, freedom from the bondage to sin, separation from the world as one of his holy people... This should be a time of great praise and celebration for you, as you reflect on these gifts!

Day 3

- † Read Philemon 15-17. Onesimus, the slave, is now a "beloved brother"! This was a revolutionary thought at the time, and one of the revolutionary aspects of early Christianity: all believers were equal in the sight of the Lord! In Christ's kingdom, there would be no social barriers. Philemon's letter was delivered at the same time as the letter to the whole church meeting there, Colossians. From that letter, v.3:11: "In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us."
- † Today, we can consider the same issues. In Genesis 1:26, it says God made people in his image, in his likeness. That likeness has been blurred by our sin, but it still is our duty to reflect God's image, especially as we grow closer to Christ, who is the perfect image of God. If we are all made in God's image, how should that impact the way we treat the handicapped? or the under-privileged? or those who are not as gifted or accomplished as we are? or the unborn?
- † Paul's exhortation also brings up another issue: grace for those of us who are saints [believers] but who do not always act like saints. In the church, we have people at all levels of faith and spiritual maturity. Paul's dealings with both Philemon and Onesimus give us an example of loving, accepting, and teaching those who are less like Christ than we are. Consider how you treat people who are not as faithful or not as obedient as you. Do you need to show more grace, more love, more acceptance? Is there a way you can better lead them by example and teaching?

Day 4

- † Read Philemon 10-16. If Paul is arguing that Onesimus no longer be treated as a slave, how was he to be useful to Philemon? Perhaps the answer lies in what happens as we grow closer to Christ. Christ frees us from our slavery to sin to make us slaves of righteousness. Because of that, we become disciples of Christ, learning to be like him. As we do that, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, to be more like Christ, which is say that we grow into the image of God we were created to be in the first place. As we reflect the true nature of God better and better, are we not better witnesses for Christ? We already saw Onesimus had a change of heart about serving while he was free in Rome, because of what Christ through Paul had done for him. What would you expect of his contribution to the church and its mission of spreading the gospel?
- † In 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul said, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.” Paul was Christ’s witness in what he taught and in the way he lived to serve. So was Philemon. Now, so was Onesimus. Our witnessing for Christ is how we represent him. What do you think witnessing looks like today, in our culture? How intentional are you about witnessing for Christ? How skilled do you think you are at it? Do you think you honor Christ in the way you witness, or do you need to improve? What action steps should you take to be a better witness?

Day 5

- † Read Philemon 7, 20. This letter is a touching discourse between friends about forgiveness and respect, about duty and rights. Paul praised Philemon for being effective at refreshing the hearts of other believers, and then asked for the same for himself. We can infer what it is Paul thinks Philemon should do to “refresh” his heart. In what ways might Philemon have refreshed the hearts of other believers? Notice that the expression of Philemon’s faith is to refresh the hearts of those in the fellowship of believers. In what way can we refresh the hearts of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ today?
- † Consider these study notes:
 - A. Epaphras helped found the church in Colosse, so he was well known and revered there by the recipients of this letter. His name would lend even more credibility to what Paul was saying.
 - B. Mark was a Jew and Barnabas’ cousin. He went on the first missionary journey with Paul, but left early. Because of that incident, Paul would not take him on the next journey, so Paul went with Silas and Barnabas went with Mark. Mark and Paul later reconciled and ministered together again, as evidenced by this letter. Mark also spent time ministering with Peter, and later wrote the Gospel of Mark.
 - C. Aristarchus was a fellow Jewish Christian from Thessalonica. He was with Paul during the riots in Ephesus and on the third missionary journey.
 - D. Demas later deserted Paul and the ministry because he loved the things of this life. [*There is a meditation issue for all of us!*].
 - E. Luke went on the third missionary journey with Paul, and later wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts.