



Pastor-Teacher | Chris Regas | 2.26.2023

A Little Letter in God's Big Story

Lesson 1 • Introduction to Philemon

How Does Such a Little Letter Fit into God's Big Story?

1. Philemon Is One of **THIRTEEN** God-Inspired Letters Paul Wrote to Churches and Leaders.

To establish disciples and local churches in making fully devoted followers of Christ who grow in maturity, serve in ministry, and invest their lives to multiply God's kingdom locally and globally.

MATURITY LETTERS	EVANGELIZE the LOST to tell, trust, teach, and totally obey the gospel for...	TRANSFORMED LIVES
① Galatians	How to remain true to the gospel, not mixing it with law or lawlessness.	1st Missionary Journey
② 1 Thessalonians	How to grow strong in the faith, hope, and love of the gospel.	2nd Missionary Journey
③ 2 Thessalonians	How to stand firm in the hope of the gospel.	
④ 1 Corinthians	How to resolve divisions by applying the gospel.	3rd Missionary Journey
⑤ 2 Corinthians	How to maintain integrity in the ministry as a minister of the gospel.	
⑥ Romans	How to live obediently in light of the gospel and its implications.	
MINISTRY LETTERS	DISCIPLE the LEARNERS in relationship, fellowship, membership, partnership to...	TEAM LABORERS
① Colossians	How to be one-minded in our relationship with Christ for the progress of the gospel.	1st Imprisonment
② PHILEMON	How to be one-minded in our FELLOWSHIP with BELIEVERS for the progress of the gospel.	
③ Ephesians	How to be one-minded in our membership in the church for the progress of the gospel.	
④ Philippians	How to be one-minded in our partnership in the ministry for the progress of the gospel.	
MULTIPLY LETTERS	EQUIP the LEADERS to guard, establish, and entrust the church to faithful men to...	TRAIN LEADERS
① 1 Timothy	How to guard the trust of the gospel and establish local churches.	
② Titus	How to set-in order what remains and select sound leaders to establish local churches.	
③ 2 Timothy	How to fulfill your ministry and multiply faithful leaders to establish local churches.	2nd Imprisonment

2. Philemon Is One of **FOUR** "Ministry Letters" Paul Wrote While Imprisoned in Rome.

"Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." Acts 28:30-31

*At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.
Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you," Philemon 22-23a*

- Paul's **first imprisonment** led to being released for **MORE** ministry on earth! *Philippians 1:21-26*
- Paul's **second imprisonment** led to being released for **GREAT** reward in heaven! *2Timothy 4:5-8*

- Prison epistles are ministry epistles: *Ministry is the result of living as a **PRISONER** of the Lord Jesus Christ.*
Colossians 1:24-26; 4:2-4, 18; Philemon 1, 9-10, 13, 23; Ephesians 4:1-3; 6:19-20; Philippians 1:12-30; 2:17-18, 25-30

In Philemon "**prisoner**" (3x) and "**chains/imprisonment**" (2x) in a letter about a "runaway" slave!

1. Becoming Christ's servant/slave **always** means **VOLUNTARILY** losing your rights **to serve** Christ and His church. *Philemon 1*
2. Paul sometimes refers to his helpers as "**FELLOW-prisoners**" even though they are not in chains like him.

Epaphras – *Philemon 23; Colossians 1:7*

Aristarchus – *Colossians 4:10*

Onesimus – *Philemon 13*

Andronicus and Junia – *Romans 16:7*

- Ministry epistles are prison epistles: *Imprisonment is the result of living as a **MINISTER** of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

1. Being Christ's servant/slave **sometimes** means **INVOLUNTARILY** losing one's rights **for serving** Christ and His church. *Philemon 9-11; 2Timothy 2:8*
2. Even though ministry could lead to imprisonment, imprisonment often led to **MULTIPLIED** ministry!
 - Paul had to *write letters* like this one to Philemon. (v. 1)
 - Paul's absence meant others had to *be equipped* to minister in his place like Archippus. (v. 2; *Colossians 4:17*)
 - Paul had to *depend* on his converts and churches to minister to him like Epaphras and Onesimus did. (vv. 13, 23)
 - Paul's example was intended to *motivate* Philemon. (vv. 8-9; *Philippians 1:12-14*)
 - Paul ultimately had to *prepare* the churches to mature and multiply without him. (*Pastoral/Multiply Epistles*)
 - Paul understood that God and His Word are *never chained* even when he was! *2Timothy 2:8-13*

3. Paul's **Ministry Letters** Reveal the **SECRET** to Faithful and Fruitful Ministry.

➤ You have to **G.R.O.W.** in Christ:

G GROWING Relationship with Christ through His Word and Spirit.

Colossians: *Probably written first around AD 60-61.*
Key verses: 1:15-29, especially vv. 27-29; 2:6, 9-10; 3:1-4

R REAL Fellowship with One Another.

Philemon: *Written at the same time around AD 60-61.*
Key verses: 4-7, 15-17, 20

O OUTSTANDING Membership in the Local Church.

Ephesians: *Possibly as the ink dried on the first two letters, Paul wrote this letter around AD 60-61.*
Key verses: 2:19-22; 3:3-7, 21; 4:11-16; 5:32

W WHOLE-HEARTED Partnership in the Work of the Ministry and Ministry of the Word.

Philippians: *Later Paul wrote to the Philippians when he's expecting his soon release around AD 61-62.*
Key verses: 1:3-7, 21-30; 2:29-30; 4:1-4, 15

➤ How does the Letter to Philemon **RELATE** to Paul's other Ministry Letters?

1. This is the *only* "ministry" epistle written to an *individual* because it deals with the second goal of discipleship: *Real Fellowship with Other Believers*.
2. While the letter is *personal*, it was not written to be *private*.
3. True biblical fellowship never happens in *isolation* from membership in a local church.

4. Philemon is the **SHORTEST** and Most **PERSONAL** of All Paul's Letters!

➤ It pulsates with the "**VIBE**" of real fellowship!

➤ No fewer than **ELEVEN** people are mentioned in 25 short verses, 9 of which are also mentioned in Colossians.

Mentioned in Philemon	Descriptions in Letter to Philemon	Colossians
1. Paul (1, 9, 17, 19)	"Paul" (3x) "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" (2x), "the aged"	1:1, 23; 4:18
2. Timothy (1)	"our brother"	1:1
3. Philemon (1-2, 7, 16, 20)	"our beloved and fellow worker", "brother" (2x), "the church in your house", "the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you"	
4. Apphia (2)	"our sister"	
5. Archippus (2)	"our fellow soldier"	4:17
6. Onesimus (10-12, 16)	"my child," who formerly was useless", now is useful", "my very heart", "No longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother"	4:9
7. Epaphras (23)	"my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus"	1:7; 4:12
8. Mark (24)	"my fellow workers"	4:10
9. Aristarchus (24)	"my fellow workers"	4:10
10. Demas (24)	"my fellow workers"	4:14
11. Luke (24)	"my fellow workers"	4:14

"In its artless revelation of Paul's devoted love to individual souls we may discover one of the secrets of his success as a missionary. It was because of his affectional, personal interest in [people] wherever he went that the Apostle was able to exercise such a powerful grip upon the hearts of his friends." – D. Edmund Hiebert

- The letter's **VALUE** is completely out of proportion to its size:

Ethical Value

Providential Value

Practical Value

Evangelical Value

Spiritual value

Social Value

Theological Value

*"For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother **{RECONCILIATION}**, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.*

*If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me **[SUBSTITUTION]**. But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account **[IMPUTATION]**; I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand **[JUSTIFICATION]**, I will repay it **[REDEMPTION]** (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ **[REAL FELLOWSHIP]**." Philemon 15-20*

Philemon is a Little Letter with a Big Message!