

The Epistle of Paul to Philemon

The Epistle to Philemon was a private letter written by Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 62). The focus of the letter is to give a proper understanding of the Hebrew fugitive law found in Deuteronomy 23:15, 16. It reveals how Paul acted in strict accordance with the requirements of the law in dealing with Onesimus, a slave who had run away from Philemon. First, Paul gave him shelter in his own hired house. He did not betray him as a fugitive, nor did he send word to Philemon to come to Rome to take Onesimus back. Furthermore, Paul instructed Onesimus in the gospel, eventually leading him to salvation in Christ (Phile. 1:10). He then sent Onesimus back to Philemon as a trusted messenger and brother in Christ, bearing a request for Philemon to grant Onesimus his freedom (Phile. 1:12). Paul did not accuse Onesimus of wrongdoing by running away from Philemon. Instead, Paul desired for Philemon to receive Onesimus back no longer as a servant, but as a beloved brother and partner in Christ (Phile. 1:15-17).

Some suggest that Onesimus had stolen something from Philemon and had run away because he was afraid of punishment he would receive. Paul graciously offered to repay this and any debts that Onesimus owed to Philemon (Phile. 1:18). It is commonly believed that Onesimus was received by Philemon and forgiven his debt, just as Paul had expected (Phile. 1:21). (Key Word, page 1510)

1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy *our* brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,
2 And to *our* beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
3 Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Expression of Thanksgiving

4 I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,
5 Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;
6 That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.
7 For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.
8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

Onesimus

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.
10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:
11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:
12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:
13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.
15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;
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?
17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.
18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth *thee* ought, put that on mine account;
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.
20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.
21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.
22 But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.
23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;
24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.
25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with your spirit. Amen. (*Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.*)

References

Hebrew – Greek Key Word Study Bible, Key insights into God’s Word, King James Version, 2nd Revised Edition, AMG Publishers ISBN 978-0-89957-745-6

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