

# Philemon 1:1-7 | David Baumgartner

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Date: 15 July 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. As most of you know, Paul went on three missionary journeys, and we see these journeys described in the book of Acts.

While traveling, Paul planted many churches. He also wrote many epistles that we have today. We just finished Colossians just a few weeks ago.

There's no indication that Paul ever traveled to Colossae, but he did spend about three years in this large city that's about 100 miles to the west.

And that city would be Ephesus. This would be around 53 to 56 AD. Ephesus became a home base of operations for Paul's ministry to Asia Minor.

Now, that's not the continent of Asia. That's actually a Roman province of Asia. It's in western Turkey. It's called Asia Minor. It's very interesting to me that in Acts 19, while Paul was in Ephesus, that he initially, it tells us, he spoke in a synagogue.

[ 1 : 16 ] But then the Jews, we read, became antagonistic to the gospel. If you have your handout by now, look with me. Speaking of Paul, it says that he withdrew, verse 9, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples.

And then it says, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. Now, the school of Tyrannus, it did exist. That school has been excavated in Ephesus.

Essentially, it's a lecture hall or an auditorium where public orders would come and visit. But God used this for his purposes.

So much so, if you look with me in verse 10, it says that, And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

So, lots of converts, lots of people affected by the gospel. And among those would be this man named from Colossae by the name of Epaphras.

[ 2 : 19 ] And another man was this wealthy slave owner by the name of Philemon. Now, many of these new converts, they would become ministry partners of Paul.

And we know this because their names keep popping up in Paul's letters. And I think, again, this just shows the power of the gospel to change lives. Changes priorities in people.

Let's fast forward a bit some seven years to 61 to 63 A.D. Paul is now in this prison in Rome. This is his first Roman imprisonment.

It's actually been thought of as more of a house arrest. The last words in the book of Acts, if you read with me there, Acts 28.

Speaking of Paul, it says, He stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness and unhindered.

[ 3 : 28 ] So we see during this first imprisonment, Paul had this steady stream of visitors. Well, like who? Well, these would be his ministry partners.

Epaphras, Timothy, John Mark, Aristarchus, Luke, Jesus, who they called Justice, and there's others. And also during this time, Paul wrote a collection of epistles known as his prison epistles. And these would be written to the three churches in Philippi, Ephesus, and then Colossae. And the purpose of these letters was to correct doctrine. But it was also to encourage believers in these churches to continue in the faith.

And of course, these letters would have to be hand-delivered to the destinations. And so for this, Paul would use his ministry partners. For example, Philippians would have been carried by Epaphroditus since he was from Philippi.

Tychicus would have carried the letters to Ephesus and Colossae because he was from Asia Minor. Well, while Paul was in there in this Roman prison, there's another man that's with him whose presence is kind of a dilemma, which brings us to this letter called Philemon.

[ 4 : 54 ] If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Philemon. It's a very short letter. It's right before Hebrews. Philemon was this wealthy man from Colossae.

And he had a slave named Onesimus. And at some point, we're not told why, but Onesimus ran away from Philemon. In fact, he may have even stolen some money.

But by the amazing providence of God, Onesimus goes to Rome. Maybe he was hoping to get lost in the crowd. And he meets up with Paul. And he gets converted.

And he begins serving the Lord by helping Paul while he's in Rome. And so you'd say, wow, praise God. All is well, right? Well, yeah.

But no. You see, Onesimus, he's now a believer. He's now saved. He's a new man in Christ. But he's also a runaway slave.

[ 5 : 55 ] And that's a crime that's punishable by death. And Onesimus needs to go back to Philemon, who's also a believer. And he needs to make things right.

Tychicus, he's getting ready to travel to Colossae with Paul's letter. And here's an opportunity. Onesimus, you go with him. And can you imagine that discussion that Paul had with this guy? Onesimus saying, Paul, do I have to? Do I have to go back and face this guy? I mean, he might turn me in. I could lose my head. Boy.

But Paul says, I know him. I know Philemon. He's a good guy. And just to make sure, I'll write him a letter on your behalf.

And so here we have Paul's shortest letter. It's only one chapter, only 25 verses. In the Greek, it's 335 words.

[ 6 : 56 ] But it, too, now becomes part of this collection of prison epistles. And so here's a question. What's Paul going to say to Philemon? Well, let's read with me Philemon.

And I think I'll read the whole letter. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our beloved brother and fellow worker, and to Ophia, our sister, and to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house, grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.

And I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake, I rather appeal to you, since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus, I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

[ 8 : 34 ] And I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very own heart, whom I wish to keep with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel.

But without your consent, I did not want to do anything, that your goodness should not be, as it were, by compulsion, but of your own free will.

Perhaps he was, for this reason, parted from you for a while, that you should have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, beloved brother, a beloved brother, especially to me, and how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

If then you regard me as a partner, accept him as you would me. But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, and I will repay it, lest I should mention to you that you owe to me your very own self as well.

Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Having confidence in your obedience, I will write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.

[ 9 : 57 ] And at the same time also, prepare me a lodging, for I hope that you, through your prayers, I shall be given to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greet you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Lord, it is our prayer that that same grace would be with us today. Just as we study your word, as we learn, Lord, about what it means to walk

in faith.

The great treasures that we find in Jesus Christ. The privilege that we have to be as believers. And Lord, may the things said here, may they be true of us.

Because they are true of you. We ask for these graces in the name of Jesus. Amen. Let's look here at the text.

Verse 1, Paul, notice here, he's a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon. Philemon. You know, I had some problems with this, because Philippians is not Philippians.

[11:13] But either way, to Philemon, our beloved brother and fellow worker. These are some of the usual conventions that we see in Paul's epistles, right?

And we also see some others that are mentioned. There's Aphia, our sister, and Archippus, our fellow soldier. It's believed by most commentators that Aphia most likely is Philemon's wife.

And Archippus is their son. Now, he's not, Archippus is not literally a soldier. This is rather used figuratively here, as a fellow comrade in arms.

We might think of someone as a warrior for Jesus Christ. Paul speaks about Archippus in Colossians. He says in chapter 4, verse 17, Say to Archippus that you fulfill the ministry you have received in the Lord.

So this tells us that Philemon and his family are active in ministry. They're useful for the Lord.

Notice here that Paul refers to Philemon as a fellow worker.

[12:22] That word is soon or with ergos. With, you know, in other words, to work together for the Lord. You're working with other people, obviously.

I was curious to know who else in Paul's mind did he consider as a fellow worker. So, you know, through a concordance here, we see in Paul's letters he refers to Urbanus.

That's a guy in Rome. And then, of course, this whole list of names that we've heard. There's Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus, Aristarchus, John Mark, Jesus, who's called Justice, Demas, Prisca, and Aquila, Euodia, and Syntyche, and Clement.

And it's just a couple others there. But you get the picture. This is a very respectable group of people that, you know, to whom you may want to associate with.

Maybe even better, be named among by none other than the Apostle Paul. Here's a question. What must you and I do to be included in this group?

[13:32] Well, this morning, my purpose is, I just want to introduce this letter by looking at the character of Philemon. We'll be looking at this next week, and then Dave Stow will be, you're in the batter's box to hit it home here.

But, so, as far as the character of Philemon, I believe there's three characteristics of a fellow worker. And may these be true of you and me as well.

First of all, a fellow worker supports the needs of others. Look with me, verse 2. Paul goes on and he notes that this letter is also to the church in your house.

This here tells us that the believers in the city of Colossae met in Philemon's home. In the early church, we see that. Believers met in each other's homes.

When they were looking for church buildings over across the big pond here, they found, the earliest one they found is in Syria, but it's dated 230 A.D.

[14:43] And so the Christians met in each other's homes. And we see that. In Jerusalem, there's Mary's house. Acts 12, 12. In Ephesus, Paul and Silas and Timothy used Lydia's home.

And then, in Rome, Priscilla and Aquila, it says, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, for whom I like, they risk their own necks, greet also the church in their house.

And then you have later in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla moved there. And it says in 1 Corinthians 16, 19, the church that's in their house. Laodicea, you have a woman by the name of Nympha, the church met at her house.

In Corinth, Gaius, the church met in his house. What we see here is that some believers supported the ministry of the local assembly.

That's what we see. Philemon used his resources to do the same. And most likely, this involved some risk. Certainly, it involved money.

[15:52] Right, Ed? You know, cooking for people? Yeah. But this was at a time when Christianity is about to be declared illegal by Nero.

Philemon, he's really not known for any great or heroic deeds. His name only shows up once. But no doubt, Philemon made a difference.

Paul goes on in verse 4. He says, speaking of Philemon, I thank God always making mention of you. He's talking about Philemon here. In my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward the saints.

This tells us when Paul prays for Philemon, two things come to Paul's mind. First, Philemon's love and secondly, his faith.

Now, his faith would be toward the Lord Jesus, but his love would be toward the saints. And apparently, these qualities of Philemon became outwardly evident to others.

[16:59] So much so that Paul hears about them while he's so many miles away up in Rome. And this made Paul glad. And he wanted to see more of it.

He goes on specifically here in verse 6. Get this. I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective. But what does that mean? Isn't that kind of an odd thing to say about faith?

Like the fellowship of your faith? I mean, why not the depth of your faith? Or why not the amount of faith that you have? Fellowship actually has a wide range of meanings.

Various translations in your English Bibles. Sharing, partnership, communion. Here's what it means. Paul desires that the partnership, that the sharing, that exists in Philemon, he wants to become increasingly energized, increasingly effective, more powerful.

And this is a good thing to want, brothers and sisters. Think of this. What if everything that you did, every project, every endeavor that you undertook was somehow heightened in its effectiveness?

[18:23] Wouldn't you like that? Yeah. Can I see some amens? Yeah. It would be wonderful. How would that come about?

Well, that leads to the second point here. A fellow worker sees all of life as coming from, I'll say this, rooted in, Christ Jesus.

Here's a question. How does a believer energize or maximize his effectiveness? Look with me, verse 6. Through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

In other words, Paul wants Philemon to have a deeper understanding, a deeper appreciation for every spiritual blessing that he has in Christ.

And that's because this is going to energize him. It's going to make his efforts, his ministry, even more effective. We might say, well, how?

[19:30] Well, look with me. There's two descriptions here. They're good things. These are good things that are in you. Now, what's in Philemon?

Well, consider all the things that Philemon for which he can be thankful for. He has a family. He has wealth. He has circumstances. His disposition.

His faith in Christ. And he, think of it, he's eternally saved from the penalty and the power of sin.

Think of his relationship with the community of faith there in Colossae.

The key thing is that all of these, they come from Jesus Christ. Amen? They apply to us. They apply to us.

Our natural tendency before Christ was actually at war with God. That's what the Bible teaches us.

But, through God's spirit, in our, through, in our, in our, starts with our conversion, he does this work in us, transforming us.

[20:40] And, and, and we should be thankful, brothers and sisters, for what the Lord does.

Secondly, not only are they good things in you, notice, they're given to us for Christ's sake.

Verse 6. In other words, we have all of these things, but notice, they're for Christ's sake. They're to be used for his purposes.

If you have been given some resources, perhaps you have some talents, some abilities, you know, you have them for a reason, and it's to give them back to Christ.

I think if you're, if you're a believer sitting here today, this hot day in July, it's good to consider, to remember, all the blessings that we have because of Jesus Christ.

Amen. I mean, not only the fact that we have them, but just the fact that we would want them more, because they want them, they make us more productive, they energize our ministry.

[21:45] It's a matter of stewardship. Paul says in his, in his letter to, in Ephesus, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Paul goes on in verse 7, and I'll be stopping there, for I, Paul, speaking here, have come to have much joy and comfort in your love.

In other words, Paul wants more of this from Philemon, and that's, and that's, and this is important here, because Philemon has already made a difference in Colossae.

You want proof? Look with me, he goes on, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. I want to ask you, have you been told that lately?

Have you been, have you been encouraged by someone coming to you and saying, you know what, I'm glad you're here. You make a difference. Why don't you turn to the person next to you and tell them that, I'm glad you're here.

[ 22 : 59 ] Go ahead, do that. I'm glad you're here. This place would not be the same without you. Yeah, I'm glad you're here, honey, you don't have anybody there.

That kind of leads to the third point here about a fellow worker. A fellow worker refreshes the hearts of others.

That word refresh there, it means to give relief. It's the same as the words that Jesus used in Matthew 11, 28, where he says, come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, I will give you refreshment.

I will give you rest. I'll give you relief. And the saints here, they've been refreshed. That's the perfect tense used here.

In other words, they have been refreshed in the past with the results that are still evident today. great. Boy, I think the church at Colossae must have been a happy church.

[ 24 : 03 ] I wonder if they danced when they got together. Yeah, maybe they did. Nothing wrong with that. But notice what was refreshed.

Their hearts. Their hearts were refreshed. The usual word for heart is *cardia*, but here it's the word *splanchnon*. It's the bowels.

It's that tenderest part of a person where kindness, benevolence, and compassion where they're deeply felt in a person.

You might ask, how did Philemon do this? It's amazing that besides opening his home, we're not told. Isn't that amazing?

We are not told what Philemon did, but most likely, it was the thousands of things that he did that went unseen.

[ 25 : 02 ] They were unseen by other people, except God. God saw them. God sees them. I love this verse out of Hebrews, for God is not unjust, so as to overlook your work, and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you do.

But what a great verse, what a great promise that God is watching and that he does and will reward us, and his rewards will be great.

Philemon, I'm sorry, Paul wants Philemon to remember all the blessings that he has in Christ, because something is going to be asked of him.

Something will be asked. Paul knows that an offense has been committed against Philemon. He's been wronged.

A debt has been incurred. You know, it might be, Philemon, you're doing great in the Lord, but deep down, you've suffered a loss.

[ 26 : 22 ] Maybe there's some unforgiveness. Maybe there's some hostility against this runaway slave. Maybe there's some nagging issues that have, that's been caused about life.

These would be perhaps theological questions. Why do bad things happen to good people? I use my home for ministry. My whole family is involved with ministry, serving the Lord.

I'm generous with my money. Why did that guy do that to me? I don't deserve it. Maybe Philemon's heart needs to be refreshed right now.

Maybe that describes some of you here today. God says it's time. You know, isn't it wonderful when God first changes, when he comes into our life and we're saved, and the Bible teaches us that we undergo this process called sanctification.

Isn't it great that God doesn't do it all at once? We couldn't take it. But there comes a point where there's something in our lives that needs to change.

[ 27 : 36 ] And the Lord Jesus, through his kindness, his compassion, his timing, he says, okay, now's the time we're going to deal with that.

And Philemon, I'm going to help you through it. I'm going to show you how. We're going to pick it up here next week. If I could ask the musicians to come forward, consider this letter, what we've seen so far.

We've been reminded of God's sovereignty. there's no accidents. Onesimus, he's in the right place at the right time. He thinks he's on the run, getting lost in a big city.

No, God's got something for him. He's going to help him through this. And God can convert this useless thief, and he can use, and God uses us for his purposes, just like he will this guy.

We also see how God has given each one of us resources, gifts, talents, skills, abilities, wealth, and they're in us, but they're given to us for a reason.

[ 28 : 53 ] And we're going to see here a picture of the Christian community. Think about this, brothers and sisters. You have two people who at one time were at odds.

the relationship is slave and master, but now their relationship is going to be brother and brother. But Philemon doesn't know that yet.

You and I all grow into adulthood with these various attitudes, beliefs. Some of them are good. Some of them are not good.

Maybe ungodly attitudes, prejudices, biases. And when we become Christians, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. And he begins this process of transformation, uprooting, ungodly attitudes and beliefs that we have.

And he exposes them because he wants us, he wants to deal with them. And he does it in his timing. And friends, we can be thankful for that, can't we?

[ 30 : 03 ] It's a blessing. It's something that God promises to do because we become more and more in that image of Christ. How do we do that? We do that by meeting together, by encouraging one another.

We learn to study God's word and we learn to apply God's word. We also thank the Lord for making it possible. And that's what we're going to transition here into the Lord's Supper and we can do that very thing.

Thanking the Lord Lord, that he made it possible that we can live that life that he has for us. Amen. Two more studies in Philemon.

We'll see you there. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that your word, Lord, it tells us these things and gives us a picture, Lord, of how beautiful it is to be part of your body.

Lord, we're grateful that you have not only saved us, but that you keep on saving us. You keep on changing us, but you're patient and you're kind.

[ 31 : 16 ] You're compassionate. You're slow to anger and your love is abounding forever. You're long suffering.

You sent your son whose blood covers us from all of our sins. And for that, Lord, we are grateful.

May you be worshipped today as we remember Jesus and remember with these emblems that are before us, the bread and the cup, that all of this, there was a price paid.

Jesus gave his life for us. so that we may be clean and forgiven before you. Thank you for all of this in Christ's name.

And God's people said, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.