

The LETTER of PAUL to PHILEMON & the LAODICEANS¹

LAST GENERATION VERSION

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Chapter 1

Greeting

Paul, prisoner of Jesus Christ, and brother Timothy;
To Philemon our beloved and fellow-worker, ² and to beloved Apphia,² and to Archippus³ our fellow-soldier, and to the assembly meeting in your house:
³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Master Jesus Christ.

Paul exhorts Philemon to set an Example for the Assembly in His House

⁴ I thank my God always, making remembrance of you⁴ over my prayers, ⁵ hearing of your love and trust which you have towards the Master Jesus and unto all the saints, ⁶ so as the fellowship of your trust may become active (in the full-knowledge of every good thing which is among you [all]),⁵ unto Jesus Christ.⁶ ⁷ For we have great joy and consolation over your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through

¹ Paul wrote a companion letter to Colossians for the assembly at Laodicea (Col. 4:16), which he sent along with his letter to the Colossians (a sister city in the region of Phrygia). Many scholars believe the Laodicean letter to be lost. However, it is clear from Colossians 4:9 that Paul was sending Onesimus back home along with the Colossian letter and this letter. The book called "Philemon" was also addressed to the assembly that met in Philemon's house (1:1-2). There is therefore no reason to suppose that the Laodicean letter mentioned in Col. 4:16 is lost. Rather the book of Philemon is actually the letter to the Laodiceans. Shortly after Paul's martyrdom, Peter mentioned a recognized and preserved collection of ALL of Paul's letters (2 Pet. 3:15-16). The earliest Christians recognized the complete collection of Paul's letters as numbering fourteen including Hebrews. It is virtually inconceivable that one would be lost without a trace, yet mentioned in the New Testament.

That Philemon was a slave owner indicates that he was wealthy. He no doubt owned a large estate, which is perhaps why the assembly at Laodicea met at his house. Three decades later Jesus had some harsh words for the Laodiceans, that they were neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, and Jesus was about to spew them out. Their lukewarmness was a direct result of their great wealth (Rev. 3:14-22).

² Apphia is a female name. She was probably the wife of Philemon.

³ Archippus was also part of Philemon's household, probably a son.

⁴ Here Paul used the singular pronoun (you) referring his comments specifically to Philemon.

⁵ Here Paul switched to the plural 'you' – referring to the whole congregation that met in Philemon's house.

⁶ As a leader (perhaps elder) of the Laodicean assembly which met in his house, Paul wanted Philemon's demonstration of Christian love (in receiving back his escaped slave Onesimus without punishment), to set an example for the whole Laodicean assembly. The language used here – "*so as the fellowship of your trust may become active ... unto Jesus Christ*" recalls Jesus' statement, "'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (Matt. 25:40).

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you, brother, through which, having great boldness in Christ, to lay forth to you that which is proper.

Paul's Appeal for Onesimus the Escaped Slave

8 However, I am encouraging you through love, being such as Paul the older, and now a prisoner of Jesus Christ. 10 I encourage you concerning my son, Onesimus, whom I have fathered in my bonds, 11 the one who was once useless to you, but now useful to you and me, whom I am sending back to you. 12 But you receive him back, that is my own bowels,⁷ 13 whom I was intending to keep for myself, so that he might serve me in the bonds of the Good Message on your behalf. 14 But without your permission I wish to do nothing, so that your good may not be from necessity but according to volition. 15 For perhaps by this he was separated for an hour so that you may receive him permanently, 16 no longer as a slave, but above a slave – a beloved brother, especially to me, yet how much more to you, in the flesh as well as in the Master! 17 If then you consider me a companion, receive him as myself. 18 And if he has harmed you or owes you, charge it to me. 19 I Paul, write with my own hand, I will repay it (I should not mention that you owe yourself to me). 20 Yes, brother, I wish to profit from you in the Master; refresh my bowels in the Master! 21 Having become confident of your obedience, I write to you, having observed that you will do even above what I ask. 22 And with this also prepare a lodging for me, for I anticipate that through the prayers of you⁸ [all] I will be granted to you.

Salutations

24 Sending greetings are Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of our Master Jesus Christ be with your breath, Amen.

To Philemon, written from Rome by Onesimus the household servant.

⁷ Paul considered Onesimus his own offspring, a part of him now, since he had brought Onesimus into the family of God.

⁸ Paul again switches to the plural [you] to include the entire assembly of Laodicea.