

The Epistle of Paul to Philemon

Paul's Plea

Philemon 17-25

1. Paul's Plea for a Positive Reception of Onesimus (vs.17-21)

Having given Philemon testimony to the changes in Onesimus (vs.10-16), Paul now appeals that Philemon's love for him guides his response to Onesimus.

A. His Plea for Personal Substitution (v.17)

"Welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me." Paul has already expressed a sense of partnership with Philemon and his own gospel ministry (vs.4-7), and now he asks the same partnership characterize Philemon's treatment of Onesimus.

B. His Offering of Personal Restitution (vs.18-19)

Paul does not state exactly what Onesimus did (or did not) rightfully owe to Philemon, but he was clear that any such debt was to be reckoned as Paul's own. This is yet another example of just how significant Onesimus was to Paul.

C. His Plea for Personal Rejuvenation (v.20)

Having already lauded the blessing that Philemon's ministry brought to others and how that has been a joy to him (v.7), Paul now seeks a more direct and intentional blessing from Philemon.

D. His Confidence in Philemon (v.21)

Based on Philemon's testimony (vs.5, 7b), Paul has no doubt that he will exceed even what Paul has encouraged him to do.

2. Paul's Future Needs (v.22)

Though he expected to be released from prison, Paul had no real knowledge of if or when that would be (cf. Phil 1:19-25). He desired to finally visit the Colossian church (cf. Col 2:1) and to see again some of the brethren there that he knew personally.

3. Paul's Greetings and Farewells (vs.23-25)

A. **Epaphras: A Prayer Warrior and Evangelist** – He is not only member of the Colossian church (Col 4:12), but he was instrumental in the proclaiming of the gospel in the formation of that church (Col 1:7). His care for his own church is paired with a deep concern for nearby brethren (Col 4:13).

B. **Mark: A Restored Worker** – He and his family were some of the earliest converts to faith in Christ (Acts 12:12), and he was a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). But sometime during

this trip, Mark had left them, and was the catalyst that separated Paul and Barnabas in their missionary endeavors (Acts 15:37-39). This schism did not last, because Mark was a blessing to Paul during his first imprisonment (v.24; Col 4:10) and Paul requested for him to come to him in his second imprisonment (2 Tim 4:11).

C. **Aristarchus: A Trial-Worn Companion** – Along with Gaius, he was grabbed by an angry mob in Ephesus on account of the economic impact that the gospel was having there (Acts 19:29). Along with a few others, he also went on ahead of Paul to prepare for his coming to Troas (Acts 20:4). He followed Paul through hardship and stayed with him while in prison.

D. **Demas: A Plant with No Fruit** – He was undoubtedly a faithful companion during Paul's first imprisonment as he is called a 'fellow worker' (v.24; Col 4:14). However, sometime during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, Demas had utterly and finally deserted him "having loved this present world" (2 Tim 4:10). Demas, along with Judas, serve as examples of thorny and rocky ground hearts in their response to the gospel; these are men who responded to the teachings of Christ outwardly, deceiving other believers (and possibly themselves), but were never truly born again (cf. Matt 13:3ff; John 6:66; 1 John 2:19).

E. **Luke: The Beloved Physician** – Very few of Paul's companions compare with Luke. He joined Paul's company in the middle of his missionary efforts (cf. Acts 16:6-10) and remained with him through both of his imprisonments (v.24; Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11).