

Introduction to Philemon

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 April 2024

Preacher: John Howard

[0 : 00] To get that background, let's go to Colossians 4, verse 7 through 9 initially, and then we're going to look at one another down the road. And it says, Tychicus, a dear brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow slayed in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me.

I send him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are doing, and that he may encourage your hearts. I send with him Onesimus, the faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here. Now, I want you to get this. Look at this.

What does he call Tychicus? A slave. A slave. Tychicus is not a slave.

Tychicus is a free man, but he's a slave in what? In Christ. And then he mentions Onesimus. Now, Onesimus is a slave, but he calls him what?

[1 : 04] A dear brother. That's intentional. That's intentional. Because this letter is going to be read to the church. This letter of the call.

That's what it's for. Okay? Then down in verse 17, we're going to meet another guy. And he says, And tell Archippus, see to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.

That's sort of a personal message at the end of this letter. See that you do what you've been commissioned to do by the Lord. All right? Now you go, okay. That's nice. Now, let's go over to Philemon.

Now you've got to go find it. It's after Timothy and Titus. But find the book of, or the letter of, it's not a book. It's a letter of 5. All right, anyway. All right. Now, it starts out this way.

So, this letter is addressed to Philemon.

[2 : 36] It's to him. And who else? The church. The church. The whole church is to hear this letter.

This is an issue that deals with Philemon and Onesimus. But why would, you have to ask yourself, well, why would the church need to know that? Wouldn't you want to keep that quiet? Wouldn't you let them deal that on their own and come to some agreement?

And Paul says, no. This is a matter of the church needs to know. Why? Because this is a fundamental issue of fellowship.

And accountability. And accountability. By the way, we use the word fellowship. When I was a young Christian, Matt and Becky, we used to talk about koinia all the time, didn't we?

Koinia, koinia. I mean, it meant a lot of things. And unfortunately, it got attached to the word fellowship. And in most churches today, fellowship means what?

[3 : 38] Eating. Eating. That's right. We're going to have a party. We're going to eat. We're going to do this. We're going to do that. And that's not it at all. That's maybe a little teeny piece of it. But it means fellowship.

It means our partnership. Our sharing in the life of Christ. It's a way. It's community. It's common life that we have in our Savior. My Sunday school class this morning got a good lesson on this.

So they have an insight you might not have yet. And so he addresses the church. He also addresses Archippus. Now there's some question of what Archippus might have been the pastor of that little church.

Some confusion on that. There's some debate on where the church met. Whether it was in Philemon's house, which is probably, in the Greek way of thinking, correct.

Because he's the one that Leonard's addressed to. So the your is Philemon. But it could be Archippus' house if they meet him. But it doesn't make any difference. The point is that the letters written to Philemon.

[4 : 38] It's going to concern Onesimus. Archippus is involved because he's a leader in the church. And the whole church needs to be participant in this.

Because it affects their relationship with one another in the Lord. So. He wants the church to understand as well what he's telling Philemon.

Because the question is how do you treat someone who's a slave? Now I know there are some people that look to Paul in this letter to say that you need to free the slaves.

The slavery is wrong. We need to abolish slavery. He doesn't say that. There are those that say Paul didn't condemn slavery so he condemned it. He didn't say that either, did he?

What he said is, literally, here is a man who is a slave. He ran away. So he's now got two things going for him.

[5 : 37] And now he's become a Christian. And he is coming back and needs to be reconciled. And he's telling Philemon and the church.

You need to respond in a way that reflects the koinia of the church. The life in Christ.

The unity we have in the body. It's no longer possible for you to look at Philemon as only a slave.

Now some slaves were valued members of the household. Some were just workers. He's saying, so it doesn't make any difference what kind of role he played or his relationship with the family.

It's now changed. He's no longer to be thought of as a slave. Now they implied that he freed him.

But that's not known. We don't know if he freed him or not.

[6 : 35] That's not the issue. The issue is not whether you freed him or not. The issue is what? He's a brother. How do you relate to someone who is not your social equal as a brother?

Think of that. Someone who is not in your normal sphere of life. How do you, if they come to the Lord, how do you treat them as a brother? Because what do we know in Christ?

They said there's no free or slave, circumcised, uncircumcised, Jew or Gentile. And in one place Paul even goes and says male and female.

We're all equal before the Lord in His mercy and grace and salvation. What does that do? If we actually do that, what does that do in our society?

You're all thinking the same thing. Yeah. You're thinking the same thing and you're acting completely different. We know that a lot of the churches were filled with slaves.

[7 : 57] Why would slaves be attracted to the gospel? Freedom. Life. Free life. Life beyond what they're suffering or dealing with day to day. And so the churches were full.

It's important that this issue had to be dealt with. Because again, you had Lydia, who was a very wealthy woman. And in that church there would have been slaves. There would have been females. There would have been males. There would have been Jews.

There would have been Gentiles. There would have been furs, I like to call them. And then you'd have the locals, whatever they were. Romans or Greeks or whatever. And somehow they had to be what?

One. One. One. In fact, in Philippians, Paul says, Be of one mind and of one spirit, standing side by side, contending for the gospel.

Well, that's not a nicety. That is an essential part of koinia. That's what you do if you have koinia. If you're living a common life, you're going to have one mind, the mind of Christ. You're going to have one spirit, the spirit of Christ.

[8 : 59] And you're going to stand side by side, helping one another, protecting one another, defending one another, assisting one another, lifting up one another, holding one another up, loving one another, eating meals with one another.

I mean, you name it, you're going to be doing it because remember in the Bible or in the New Testament, how many one-to-ones are there? One another, one to another. There are like 66 times it says, one another.

One another this, one another that. It caused every part of our lives. It's tied up in this unity that we have in Christ. And if the wife, just think what the people in Colossae were saying when they see Philemon and Onesimus hugging each other and loving one another and working with one another and calling each other brother.

Where are they going to go? What is going on here? He's a slave. You're a master. Yeah, but we're brothers in Christ.

Saul turns the world upside down. Just like Paul's teaching on women. Women are equal with men. They have the same position in Christ.

[10 : 13] That's not the way the Roman world was organized. The husband literally had life and death power over his family, children and wife. She had no power in and of herself unless he

allowed her.

It turned the whole thing upside down. So it didn't make any difference if slavery was abolished or not abolished. In Roman society, what was important is that it did not affect relationships within the church.

It changes everything. Well, there are two issues basically in this letter and I don't get to talk about any of them, by the way.

Because the way that Paul wrote this letter and the way he did a lot of his letters in the first seven verses, which is the introduction, there's the greeting and then the introduction, he brings up the major topics that he's going to address during the letter.

You notice he doesn't even talk about Onesimus in the first seven verses. He does address the people there, but not Onesimus and not the situation he's writing about. He mentions two things, love and faith.

[11 : 21] And partnership is the third thing. And those two things sort of fit under that koinia, that partnership. And what he's going to do, and Glenn and Matt are going to get to tell you all the good news there, he's going to take those two things underneath the word koinia and he's going to say, if you have koinia, then this and this have to operate this way.

But he also says an interesting thing a little later, he says, I could tell you because of my apostolic authority, you will do this, but I'm not going to do that.

I'm going to tell you what this brother has to say to that brother about how a life should be in Christ. And you have to decide how you're going to work it out. Remember that thing in Philippians?

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. That's basically what he's telling Philemon. Work out this situation with fear and trembling within the church.

Don't do it in Roman society. Do it in the church. In church, what you need to help them, you need to be praying for them, you need to be encouraging them because what they're going to do is going to affect you in your unity and in your faithfulness to Christ.

[12 : 46] Okay, I've just ruined my whole sermon because I didn't follow my notes. But, I want you to think about that because you're going to be hearing about that stuff that I just talked about a lot in the next two sermons.

And then you've got to say, as all my, every time you get something in the New Testament, you need to go, and what does this have to do with me?

Right? It's nice to have that knowledge. Oh yeah, Paul said that we need to treat everyone the same. What does this have to do with me? And more importantly, what does that have to do with our church?

Because we have koinia. Koinia. We have, by the fact that we're here, said, I partner with you in active participation.

I'm going to be doing with you. By the way, koinia is not a state of being. Just like love is not a state of being, faith is not something you just have in your head. They're active verbs.

[13 : 49] You love. You have faith. You act on faith. You have. You act in koinia together. What does that mean?

Who are the slaves of our society? Who are the ones that we would reject because they're not like us in our society that could be, need to be, reached out to with the gospel?

If they showed up, would be accepted and loved. Now, I know some of you are thinking, well, I sure don't want them here. And the answer is probably not.

But, I just saw an article on Christianity Today and it was about marriage. And the person, the title of it was, pick a sinner, any sinner.

I thought, well, that's an interesting topic. You know what he's saying? The person that wrote it is saying, in every marriage, there are two what? Sinners. Are they always going to do things right?

[14 : 57] No. What do you do when you have a sinner? The same thing Christ did. What did He do? You forgive one another. You don't accept the sin particularly, but you accept the sinner.

In this case, they were married to one another. I can relate to that. I'm a sinner. Teresa's a sinner. She's probably less the sinner than I am. But anyway, it only takes one.

Same thing. If a person walks in here and they're doing something, their lifestyle is such that we don't approve of it, do we tell them they're not welcome? Or do we love them? We may be honest with them.

We don't accept what you do. We see that as sin. By the way, I don't think our society understands sin. They don't know what that word really means. We accept you, but not your sin. But you are welcome here and we're going to love on you. We're going to love on you. And maybe by loving on you enough, you'll understand that what you're doing needs to change. [15 : 58] Same thing. And Onesimus comes back. He's a runaway. You know what? Philemon could even, depending on what he did, he could have not been in prison, he could have had him executed. And Paul's saying, don't do that.

He's a sinner. You're a sinner. By the way, they're both children. Paul's going to appeal to them as a father. He's going to say, by the way, you owe me your life. I gave life to Onesimus through the Gospel.

You're both brothers and I'm your father. Love one another. Forgive one another. He's a sinner. You're a sinner. Forgive each other. Love each other. Have fellowship with us. Work together. And by the way, if you don't really need Onesimus, you can send him back to me because I already can use him. So you get the point? Are you ready to study Philemon in a little, hopefully, useful way?

Good. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you've given us this letter. And sometimes, Lord, we just read these things and just sort of gloss over it. I don't even understand what you're trying to say.

[17 : 01] Help us to pick into this and see, to understand what Paul was saying and what it should do to the church, our church, as well as what it did in the church of Colossae.

Help us to grasp, Lord, what Koine is all about. The love that we should have for one another, but also sharing and partnership in the work of the gospel and living out life in Christ.

Help us, Lord, we pray. And we thank you for your wisdom and your grace that you've given us in this letter. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.