**Philemon**

**Spiritual Maturity**

Some question if Paul was really the author because there is no doctrinal teaching in this epistle. By the time Paul writes to Philemon he has revealed the revelation of the mystery. His apostolic authority is complete; he has finished writing to the Body of Christ. Notice Paul does not identify himself as an apostle in this letter.

Philemon is placed at the at the end of Paul's writings for a purpose. Paul's writings are laid out according to the design of edification.

Philemon represents spiritual maturity, putting it all together.

* **Roman** **- Galatians** is doctrine for establishment
* **1 and 2 Thessalonians** are the living demonstration of that doctrine, ensamples.
* **1 and 2 Timothy** is doctrine for the body life, the need for order in the local assembly.
* **Titus** is doctrine for godliness
* **Philemon** is how to apply all that Paul has taught and to maintain the godliness that God designed the local assembly to abide in.

Philemon is the application of godliness. Paul tells Titus to adorn doctrine; there is heavy emphasis on works.

Philemon is placed at the end of Paul's writings because it is the crowning jewel of God's instruction for us. Philemon instructs us how godliness is to be exercised.

Philemon was a man who was grounded and established in the doctrine that Paul taught. ***Paul does not have to give him direct instruction.***(v21) Paul does not command Philemon to respond in a particular way but rather he beseeches (v9,10)

(Philemon 1:8-10 KJV) Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,*{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:

**Three People:**

* v1-7 Philemon - Father - the offended
* v8-17 Onesimus - sinner - the offender
* v18-25 Paul - mediator (Son) - the mediator between the two

**Some Grace Principles:**

* v6-7,22 - Care for one another
* v8,9,14 - Submitting to one another
* v9,10 - Tenderhearted to one another
* v12 - Kindly affectioned to one another
* v12,17,18 - Substitution
* v15,16 - Forgiveness
* v16 - Prefer one another
* v17 Serve one another
* v19 - Bear one another's burdens
* v21 - Abounding love

Philemon was a wealthy man who housed a church. Onesimus was a slave who ran away and probably stole something. The reason to believe that is in order to runaway he needed to have money. He was not only a runaway slave but a thief.

While in Rome, Onesimus meets Paul and gets saved. Paul tells Onesimus to return to Philemon. Under Roman law, a runaway salve can be maimed, mutilated or even crucified if he is ever caught. Imagine the resistance that Onesimus must have felt to go back to Philemon. Paul wrote this letter for Onesimus' sake.

Onesimus could escape prosecution of Roman law by having Philemon adopt him into the household. We are to take the offender and make him a legal member of the household (v15).

v21 - Paul had confidence in Philemon to react to the situation in a godly manner. (see verse 7) Philemon would do more that what Paul expected him to do.

Principle of reception (v12,13,17): Receive him. Who has the burden and responsibility to receive? The burden is on the offended, not the offender. (Galatians 6:2) One would think this letter would have been written to the one who did the offending and telling him to correct the situation. But this isn't so, the letter is written to the one who is strong.

Philemon is one who has been established in grace doctrine and Paul places the responsibility on the one who was spiritual mature.

v12 - Philemon is to receive Onesimus affectionately and in the same manner as he would receive Paul (v17). There ought not be any resentment in receiving him back. Paul tells Philemon not to take him back as a sinner, based upon what he did but who he now is, a saint (v16).

(1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 KJV) But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: {8} So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

Paul demonstrates his heart, he  was affectionate and gentle, as a nurse that cherishes. Paul did not view the saints and ministry as obstacles, but rather as an opportunity. He told them that he was gentle among them and this ought to be our attitude with one another.

(Ephesians 4:31-32 KJV) Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: {32} And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Our reaction to an offense needs to be in gentleness, tenderness, not of malice, bitterness.

Paul challenges Philemon to be gentle, to be sensitive to the needs Onesimus might have. Philemon is to alleviate the misery that the offender might have. Paul holds Philemon responsible to receive the offender and to seek to alleviate the distress he might have.

**How Philemon is to receive Onesimus:**

(Philemon 1:15-16 KJV) 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?

Philemon 15 - Philemon was to receive Onesimus forever and above a servant, as a beloved brother. Philemon is not to view Onesimus as his past identity, no longer a servant but as a member of the Body of Christ.

We are to receive one another based on eternal relationship in Christ. The best way to know one another is the same way we are to know Christ: no longer know any man after the flesh.

(1 Corinthians 4:3-7 KJV) But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.{4} For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. {5} Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. {6} And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. {7} For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Those at Corinth judged one another after the flesh. They judged Paul in the flesh, not according to who he was in Christ. Things we see are temporal. Paul tells Philemon to receive Onesimus based on what he does not see, the eternal things.

Paul did not judge himself based on his accomplishments. Paul based his ministry on the judgment of the Lord not what man says. Paul is trying to correct the carnal attitude the Corinthians has toward Paul.

v17 Paul tells Philemon not to receive Onesimus as a runaway slave who has offended him but as a brother. Don't expect the weak and immature to do anything but expect the strong and perfect to take the responsibility. Paul viewed Philemon as a partner.

v19 - Paul tells Philemon that he would have received Paul as a sense of indebtedness. Paul tells Philemon that it is HE [Philemon] owes Onesimus. (*The offended owes the offender.*) Only grace can allow any of us to have that attitude - to have the offended view the offender as the one that we owe.

Philemon was well aware of the sufferings of Paul. Philemon understood and knew of his indebtedness to Paul.

(Galatians 5:13-15 KJV) For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. {14} For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. {15} But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

There is a limitation to our liberty - by love we are to serve one another.

(Ephesians 4:25 KJV) Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

Neighbor = you and I (members of the Body of Christ). Philemon was to take Onesimus back, not to bite and devour him but to serve him, the offender.

The following verse summarizes Philemon:

(Romans 12:10 KJV) Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

He was to receive Onesimus affectionately, with brotherly love, in honor preferring him.

(Romans 12:16 KJV) Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Prefer those in low estate; it is easy to prefer those who are higher than you.

(Philippians 2:2-5 KJV) Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. {3} Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. {4} Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. {5} Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

We are to think of others first. Receive one another as we are indebted to them. In lowliness of mind, Christ was equal with God but He put others first. Instead of exercising his right to be worshipped as Creator God, He willing chose to serve others; He esteemed them higher than Himself.

Paul told Philemon, "Perhaps you were offended but here's how you should respond..."

We are to esteem others better than ourselves. We owe one another a debt of love. We owe one another an opportunity to serve one another.

v21 Paul knew Philemon would be obedient to what He would say and yet do more.

**(Philemon 1:21 KJV) Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.**

Reference:  
my notes from teaching by Alex Kurtz