

**Text:** Philemon 21-25

**Title:** Closing Words

**Date/Location:** Sunday May 1, 2016 at FBC

## **Introduction**

We now have reached the conclusion of the letter to Philemon. I want back up to verse 21 and then proceed to study the final verses.

### **I. More Than Asked, v. 21**

What I said last time was that Paul knows Philemon well and has every confidence that he will respond positively to the request to receive Onesimus. In fact, he expects that Philemon will go beyond what Paul asks. The kind of character that Philemon has and the idea of "going beyond" or "doing more" is an important one.

- A. God often does far more than you ask, and He is certainly able to do so (Eph. 3:20).
- B. Jesus did far more than we could ever have asked (John 10:15, 15:13-14; 1 John 3:16).
- C. Disciples are told to "go the extra mile," in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:39-43).
- D. Philemon was a good Christian man and Paul expected he would also go the extra mile, whatever that might be. At least it would include a warm and welcoming response to Onesimus, not just a perfunctory acceptance back into the household.

### **II. Prepare Hospitality, v. 22a**

- A. One of the additional things that Philemon could do would be to prepare a guest room for Paul to stay in.
- B. Somewhat surprisingly, Paul hoped to gain release from this imprisonment and be able to travel the (very roughly) 1500 miles to see Philemon in Colossae. Today, this trip would take almost 30 hours by car and ferry, or over 5 hours by commercial jet airplane. If only it were so easy for Paul—but he faces the reality that he may not get out of jail alive. We believe he did get out. But he went back into jail a second time and that time had no hope of release (2 Timothy 4:6).
- C. Safe and affordable hospitality was very important in the first century for Christian missionaries like Paul and his team. In many places today the issue of safety is not as much of a concern, but cost still is. And, there is

not much that is better than Christian fellowship around a table and lodging for a night or more when in a far country.

I still feel a bit odd when missionaries want to stay in a hotel or when churches put up a missionary in a hotel. It does cost money to pay for convenience, but it is not true hospitality to merely pay someone else to do hospitality. Keep the missionary in your home and give him the money you saved on the hotel bill – \$100 a night or whatever – and everyone will be better off! You will be blessed, the missionaries will be encouraged and save money, your children will be benefited, and the church will be edified. Maybe we don't know how tight most missionary salaries are...if we lived on what they live on for a few months, we might appreciate the need for help that they have.

D. Hospitality is commanded in the NT. See Romans 12:13 and 1 Peter 4:9 for all believers, and 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 for pastors specifically. This includes meals in the home, overnight accommodations, and lengthier stays for missionaries. Hebrews 13:2 has to be thrown into the mix here. Of course we cannot be foolish and bring in everyone off the street; letters of recommendation would be a good practice to make sure the people are legitimate. We had a situation one time where a person who professed to be a Christian was in town and stopped by, having to do with fixing his car or something, and we had some other believers over at the time, so we asked him to join us for the meal.

### **III. Paul Expects His Release to Come Through Prayer, v. 22b**

Getting back to the text of Philemon, prayer is a key part of Paul's hope to need hospitality. Notice that he writes, "I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you."

- A. Paul had no problem suggesting that Philemon's prayers would result in Paul being delivered from jail in Rome. First, he assumed Philemon was praying that way. Do we know anyone in jail for the gospel right now? We should be praying! If not specifically, then we should pray at least generally with our brothers being hurt in Muslim- and communist-controlled lands.
- B. Second, Paul trusted that God would answer the request favorably. The words "I shall be granted to you" indicate a gracious gift that God would give to Paul. It would be an act of extreme benevolence on God's part, although no problem for Him to accomplish. This same word is used in other contexts having to do with forgiving (Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13, 3:13; see

also Luke 7:42). *Here* the idea is not forgiveness, but rather to give as a gracious favor. Important examples are frequent in Scripture:

Romans 8:32; Gal. 3:18 of God's granting of the Abrahamic covenant; Phil. 1:29 of the grant of belief and suffering to believers; Phil. 2:9; Luke 7:21 of granting of sight; Acts 27:24 of God giving Paul the lives of all those who sailed with him; and Acts 3:14 of Pilate's granting of Barabbas to the crowds who demanded Jesus to be crucified.

C. Third, he figured that God had foreordained **the prayers and the answers** to the prayers together in His plan. Paul indicates no tension here, for example, that prayer is useless because God already ordained the outcome of his imprisonment. In other words, some would venture to say that if God has ordained everything that will happen, then prayer is useless because those things will happen anyway.

1. That would sort of be like (in the reverse) the Romans feeling that imprisoning Paul is useless because God already ordained the prayers and His answers to them. "Why put Paul in prison? He's going to either be released or killed anyway whenever his time is up, so let's just let God take care of that!"
2. The truth is that both prayer and outcome are ordained. Prayer is commanded. We must therefore pray as best we understand to be in accordance with God's will and leave the results in His hands. That last part is what trust is! God has worked together His children's requests and His answers in His plan. Both parts are necessary.

#### IV. Final Greetings, v. 23-24

Paul passes greetings from five coworkers:

- A. Epaphras. We know from Col. 4:12-13 that this man used his prison time for prayer time. He labored in prayer for the benefit of the Colossian believers. He was a good minister of the gospel.
- B. Mark. We studied him quite extensively at Colossians 4:10-11, and I recommend you go to those notes for the details. Remember that Mark left the missionary team prematurely from Paul's perspective; later Barnabas took him along in missions work; Mark became useful again during this time and Paul had him as a helper again; Mark was closely associated with Peter; Mark's mother Mary had a prayer meeting in their home; and Mark wrote the gospel that has his name on it. Mark exemplified "failures redeemed." If you have muffed it, get back into the

Christian life. Don't give up! Take your lumps and learn from them. God doesn't use anything but broken vessels anyway, so He can use you!

- C. Aristarchus. He was a Macedonian Jew (Col. 4:10-11, Acts 19:29), and he faced some of the same dangers that Paul did in ministry. He was closely associated with Paul in his imprisonment.
- D. Demas. He's the one who later exhibited love for the world (2 Timothy 4:10). In light of Matthew 16:24, John 12:25, and 1 John 2:15-17, this was not a diagnosis that I would want to hear about myself!
- E. Luke was the physician-turned-historian for the team. God had him along as the "secretary." Oh, what an important ministry that was, so that we could have Luke's gospel and the book of Acts today, both first rate histories of the works of Christ in His earthly ministry and of the progress of the early church.

## V. Grace-Filled Benediction, v. 25

- A. **Grace.** As Paul trusted for benevolent help from God to be released from prison, so he wished God's gracious favor on Philemon and his family as well as the church family.
- B. The grace **of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We cannot gloss over this. The grace is not just "of God" generically or in a way that leaves Christ out in second place. God's grace is Christ's grace; Christ's grace is divine grace. We follow the Trinitarian teaching of the Bible that accords worship to Christ as well as to God the Father (Rev. 5:8-10, 12-14).
- C. Be with your spirit. The "your" here is plural, so it is not limited to Philemon alone.

## Conclusion

Such is the end of Philemon: an expression of confidence in abundant obedience; prayer and hospitality; greetings, and grace. What an example of a personal letter. And what an example of how to handle a difficult situation! The next time you face something difficult, take time to review Philemon and some of the passages we have mentioned about forgiveness and grace and such. It will be helpful.

Be an intercessor like Paul; be a penitent sinner like Onesimus; be a loving Christian like Philemon. And recognize the extreme grace that God has bestowed upon you!

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