

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO PHILEMON

A. Greeting (1-3)

1. From Paul and Timothy (1a), *Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother*, (ESV)

a. Paul

- 1) This is the man called by Jesus Christ to be the apostle to Gentiles.
- 2) He describes himself as a prisoner because of his service for Christ.
 - a) This is the only time Paul referred to himself in the greeting of an epistle as a prisoner of Christ.
 - b) Paul made reference to his imprisonment six times in this letter (Philemon 1, 9, 10, 13, 22, 23).
 - c) D. Edmond Hiebert, *As himself the Lord's bondsman he will plead for another bondsman whose story is the burden of this letter.*
 - d) H. Carson, *He is not asking for a measure of sacrifice from Philemon, as one who knows nothing of sacrifice. He has forfeited his freedom for Christ's sake and so has a ground for appealing.*
- 3) Also, he considered himself as one who was taken captive by Jesus Christ.
 - a) Ephesians 6:6 ...*bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,*
 - b) Jac Muller, *Instead of the usual reference to his apostleship, he here introduces himself only as one who finds himself in captivity for the sake of Christ and His cause, and who is now going to write from prison as a friend to a friend and from heart to heart.*

b. Timothy

- 1) His background
 - a) Timothy learned the Old Testament Scriptures from his godly mother and grandmother, 2 Timothy 3:15, *and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* (ESV)
 - b) Timothy became a frequent companion of Paul from the time they met at Lystra on Paul's Second Missionary Journey, Acts 16:2, *He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.* (ESV)
 - c) Paul spent time discipling Timothy and wrote two of his last letters to Timothy, 1 and 2 Timothy.
- 2) Paul mentioned Timothy who was with Paul when he wrote the letter from Rome.
 - a) Paul identified Timothy as a brother in Christ who was concerned for the Colossians' well-being and one who would become prominent as a future Christian leader.
 - b) It is believed that Philemon knew Timothy which would strengthen Paul's appeal to Philemon.
 - c) Grant Osborne, *The significance is that this letter is not just a private affair; it comes to Philemon and his family (and perhaps the entire Colossian church) from Paul and his ministry team in Rome.*

2. To Philemon and the church at Colossae (1b-2), *To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:* (ESV)

a. Philemon

- 1) He is only mentioned here in the New Testament.
- 2) Paul considered him a beloved fellow worker, one who helped build up the church in Colossae while Paul was serving in Ephesus, note Acts 19:1-22.
- 3) Philemon must have been well off since he had a home large enough to host the Colossian church.
- 4) Legend has it that he became bishop of Colossae and suffered martyrdom.

b. Apphia

- 1) She was probably Philemon's wife and a Christian since Paul addressed her as *sister*.
- 2) Paul possibly addressed her directly since wives had daily responsibilities for the household slaves.
- 3) Knute Larson, *...Paul also recognized that Onesimus would return not only to Philemon, but to the household, including Apphia. She also needed to understand the necessity of Christian forgiveness and love.*

- c. Archippus
 - 1) It is thought that he was the son of Philemon and Apphia.
 - 2) He was called a *fellow soldier*
 - a) It probably refers to his leadership in ministry as noted by Paul in Colossians 4:17, *And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."* (ESV)
 - b) The phrase was used of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25, describing Christian leaders as members of God's army.
 - c) Some believe he was actually serving in the church in nearby Laodicea based on Colossians 4:17.
- d. *the church in your house*
 - 1) Churches did not start meeting in dedicated buildings until the 3rd C.
 - 2) Other house churches were mentioned in the New Testament.
 - a) 1 Corinthians 16:19, *The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.* (ESV)
 - b) Colossians 4:15, *Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.* (ESV)
 - 3) Knute Larson, *Paul addressed this letter to this group of believers because when Onesimus returned, they would need to welcome him into their fellowship. They must receive this slave as a Christian brother.*

3. A salutation (3), ***Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*** (ESV)

- a. This is the same salutation by Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians except that he added the name of Jesus here.
- b. Thomas Constable, *Perhaps Paul intended that this addition would remind the recipients (plural "you" in Greek) of their union in Christ and God's grace to them in Christ.*
- c. Paul gave them a two-part blessing from *God our Father*
 - 1) First, there is *grace*.
 - a) It is God's unmerited favor and enablement.
 - b) It is most evidently seen in the Gospel, Ephesians 2:8, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* (ESV)
 - 2) Second, there is *peace from God*.
 - a) This is the inner confidence God gives to those who have received His grace.
 - b) Peace is the result of grace received from God when one places trust in Christ alone, Romans 5:1, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (ESV)
 - c) Peace continues to be supplied through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 5:18, *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,* (ESV)

B. Thanksgiving and prayer (4-7)

- 1. Paul's thanksgiving for the Colossians (4-5), ***I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints,*** (ESV)
 - a. Paul does not specify who he is speaking to in this thanksgiving.
 - 1) Is it everyone in the greeting or specifically to Philemon?
 - 2) I believe it is understood to be Philemon based on Paul's note in verse seven where he speaks of *my brother*.
 - b. The Greek construction ties love to saints and faith to the Lord Jesus, even though they are not side by side.
 - 1) This structure is a chiasm where the middle point is emphasized.
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *This construction emphasizes the unity of the entire thought: love for the saints grows out of faith in Christ.*

- c. Therefore, Paul thanked God for Philemon's love for all the saints and his faith in the Lord Jesus.
 - 1) Both of these spiritual gifts were noted in Colossians 1:4, *since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints*, (ESV)
 - 2) Edwin Deibler, *Paul may have heard about Philemon's faith in Christ and love for the saints from Onesimus and Epaphras. Philemon's faith in Christ produced love for all the saints. Since Philemon loved "all" the saints, he surely should include Onesimus, now a saint, in his love!*
- d. James Dunn, *Paul must have had an extensive prayer list and presumably spent some time each day naming before God all his churches, colleagues, and supporters. This would help maintain and strengthen the sense of a faith shared with 'all the saints' (5-6).*

2. Paul's prayer for them (6), ***and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.*** (ESV)

- a. He prayed that Philemon's witness would become not only active but fully effective.
 - 1) Edwin Deibler, *As Philemon would gain a fuller understanding of his blessings in Christ he would become more active in sharing Him. He would share Christ in his full understanding of his blessings.*
 - 2) Jac Muller, *A sharing of the faith must not be something static, but dynamic, must function effectually and reveal the full activity of a life of faith,*
 - 3) Paul was probably looking to Philemon expressing love even with Onesimus.
- b. Some believe Paul was encouraging Philemon to allow his faith to become increasingly visible through his life.
 - 1) Peter O'Brien, *The apostle's prayer was not simply that Philemon might understand or appreciate the treasures that belonged to him, but that he might also experience them*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *As Philemon's appreciation of God's grace toward him grew he should have wanted to demonstrate more grace toward others in his interpersonal relationships. Paul had in mind Onesimus particularly.*

3. Paul's testimony concerning Philemon (7), ***For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.***

- a. Paul declared how good it was to know of Philemon's love for the brethren.
- b. Paul stated that Philemon had refreshed the hearts of the saints in Colossae by his ministry to them.
- c. Grant Osborne, *Paul's description of Philemon in these verses provides a wonderful blueprint for church ministry that should be studied by every Christian leader... Caring oversight and service are the other side of a strong teaching and preaching ministry. Pastors need to be strong preachers, but they also need to be loving people-persons who cultivate life-giving relationships within their congregations and minister to personal needs.*
- d. Knute Larson, *Paul did not give hollow praise or flattery to Philemon. His compliments were declarations of true gratefulness and joy. But Paul did lay a solid and compelling groundwork for what he was about to ask of Philemon.*

C Paul's plea to Philemon (8-11)

1. It was a plea not a command (8-9), ***Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you - I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus-***

- a. Paul started his plea concerning Onesimus with *accordingly*.
 - 1) It means *therefore, for this reason, so then.*
 - 2) He is looking back to verses 4-7 where Philemon's love for *all* the saints should include Onesimus.
- b. Paul declared that he had the right to order Philemon to do what he should do concerning Onesimus.
 - 1) He stated that it is because he is *bold enough in Christ*.
 - a) The word for *bold enough* carries the strength of *fearlessly*.

- b) His boldness was authority as an apostle of Christ. Note 1Thessalonians 2:6, *Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.*
 - c) He knew he could command Philemon to receive Onesimus and was confident Philemon would do it.
 - d) G. Osborne, *Paul would never misuse his power, for Christ was the true “commander,” and Paul was a team player who led his associates but never manipulated them to obedience. This is an incredibly important model for Christian leaders today, as I have seen way far too many dictators in the church and in Christian organizations. There is no place for this in the Christian community.*
- 2) Paul strongly declared that what he would request was the right thing to do.
- a) *what is required* means *what is fitting or right.*
 - b) It has the emphasis of moral judgment.
 - c) Colossians 3:18, *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*
- c. He chose to appeal to Philemon on the basis of love.
- 1) T. Constable, *...the love of Christ that bound all the parties involved in this situation together.*
 - 2) Paul noted in the introduction of Philemon’s love for all the saints.
 - 3) Paul knew of Philemon’s love for Paul and was reminded that Paul was old and a prisoner for Christ Jesus.
 - a) K. Larson, *Paul opened his heart. He was old, perhaps tired, and he felt the loneliness and isolation of prison; he appealed to Philemon’s sensitivities, friend to friend.*
 - b) J. Muller, *A request coming from the prison, from a man who was ready to sacrifice his life for the gospel of Christ, cannot be lightly refused.*
2. Paul’s appeal was on behalf of his spiritual son (10-11), ***I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.)***
- a. Paul’s pleaded for Onesimus.
 - 1) Onesimus was Philemon’s slave who had run away.
 - 2) He was from Phrygia, a region in what is now central Turkey.
 - 3) T. Constable, *Onesimus had confirmed the popular estimate of his class and nation by his own conduct since Phrygian slaves were proverbial for being unreliable and unfaithful.*
 - b. Onesimus became Paul’s spiritual son while imprisoned in Rome.
 - 1) Paul only used this term of endearment, *my child*, only of Onesimus, Timothy and Titus, note 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2 and Titus 1:4.
 - 2) K. Larson, *...Paul lifted the slave into the intimacy of kinship, just as Christ lifts the sinner into the loving fellowship and inheritance of his family. Paul demonstrated true Christian faith and love.*
 - 3) D. Carson on Paul, *This is the one-time self-righteous Pharisee, the heir of Jewish exclusiveness, and he is speaking of a Gentile, and a Gentile slave at that, from the very dregs of Roman society—yet he can refer to him as a son.*
 - c. Paul declared that there had been a positive change in Onesimus.
 - 1) Onesimus means *useful* which had not been a picture of Onesimus’ life under Philemon’s control.
 - 2) Now, his name portrayed new life in Christ since Paul had led Onesimus to Christ.
 - a) G. Osborne, *So it was a transformed Onesimus who returned to Colossae - no longer a pagan slave but now a brother in Christ.*
 - b) K. Larson, *Paul never dismissed Onesimus’s former conduct ... but he also did not restrict Onesimus to his past.*
 - 3) Onesimus was useful to Paul and could become useful to Philemon if he would receive Onesimus as Paul would request.

- D. Paul's reason for returning Onesimus to Philemon (12-16)
1. It was difficult for Paul to part with Onesimus (12-13), *I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel,*
 - a. Paul made the decision to send Onesimus back to Philemon.
 - 1) He didn't hide his emotions concerning his desire to keep Onesimus in Rome.
 - a) He described Onesimus' return as if he was sending his own heart.
 - b) K. Larson, *Paul felt he was tearing his own heart out, as though a piece of himself would be gone once Onesimus departed.*
 - c) T. Constable, *Onesimus had so endeared himself to Paul that his departure was an extremely painful prospect for the apostle. Paul could have justified keeping the slave with him, but he judged that Onesimus' obligation to return to his owner was more important.*
 - 2) Paul made the hard choice to do the right thing.
 - a) J. Muller, *That Paul is sending him, proves that Paul insists on his returning to his master and that the matter between him and Philemon should be settled.*
 - 1] G. Osborne, *Paul was not required to send Onesimus back to Philemon, but he was expected to seek reconciliation.*
 - 2] O'Brien, *...fugitive slaves who sought sanctuary in a household were likely to be given temporary protection by the householder until either a reconciliation with the master had been effected or else the slave had been put up for sale in the market and the resulting price paid to the owner.*
 - b) K. Larson, *Fresh beginnings come through confession, repentance, change, and right choices. Onesimus had proved himself in every respect, joining in ministry with Paul while in Rome. But the evidence of his transformation did not erase former obligations and relationships.*
 - b. Paul emphasized how valuable Onesimus was to him in Rome.
 - 1) Onesimus was described as one who served Paul as Philemon would if he were there.
 - 2) The heaviness of Paul's imprisonment was lightened by Onesimus' ministry to Paul.
 - 3) Paul may have mentioned his desire to have Onesimus with him as a hint to Philemon to return Onesimus.
 2. Paul wanted Philemon to make the right decision concerning Onesimus (14), *but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.*
 - a. Paul did not want to coerce Philemon into releasing Onesimus to serve Paul.
 - 1) He didn't want to take advantage of their relationship or his position of leadership.
 - 2) 1 Peter 5:2, *shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;*
 - 3) G. Osborne, *This section of the letter is as critical in our day as it was in Paul's, and these principles should be mandatory reading for conflict-resolution in Christian circles.*
 - b. Paul desired that it be of Philemon's *own accord.*
 - 1) This word is only used here in the New Testament.
 - 2) The emphasis is *voluntary, without being forced or pressured.*
 - 3) K. Larson, *If Philemon returned Onesimus to Rome, he must do so from a generous spirit. So Paul released both men to act according to conscience, prayerful and expectant that they would respond according to God's truth and goodness.*
 3. Paul wanted Onesimus to see what God had done in the life of Philemon (15-16), *For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.*
 - a. Paul encouraged Philemon to consider the hand of God in Onesimus' departure from Colossae.
 - 1) God promises to work things for the greater good, Romans 8:28, *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*
 - 2) Onesimus left as a slave but returned as a brother, note Colossians 4:9, *and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.*

- b. Paul declared that Philemon should be even more excited than Paul because of what took place in Onesimus' life.
 - 1) Paul came to know Onesimus as a Christian brother.
 - 2) Philemon could now know Onesimus as a Christian brother and a faithful servant.
 - a) In the flesh corresponds to his role as a slave, Colossians 3:22, *Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.*
 - b) In the Lord corresponds to his role as a Christian brother, Philemon 10-11, *I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.)*
 - c) K. Larson, *Even if Onesimus remained a slave, nothing would ever be the same. Onesimus was changed, and Philemon would find him valuable as a man, as a worker, as a friend—but also as a spiritual brother, a man with whom he found the deeper communion of soul to soul before the Lord*
- A. Paul's request concerning Onesimus (17-21)
- 1. Paul asked that Philemon receive Onesimus as he would receive himself (17), ***So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.***
 - a. Finally, Paul makes his request to Philemon concerning Onesimus.
 - b. So looks back to what he had just written to Philemon concerning the supernatural change in Onesimus' life.
 - c. Paul put the request in the form of a 1st class conditional clause.
 - 1) That means what is being said is assumed to be true.
 - 2) Paul believed that Philemon considered Paul his *partner* which is the basis on which Paul made his request.
 - a) They are serving Christ together for the same reasons and with the same goals.
 - b) D. Hiebert, *Paul's term 'partner' must not be weakened to mean merely an intimate friend or companion. It suggests the fellowship or partnership of those who have common interests, common feelings, common work. It is a spiritual fellowship and has a double aspect, Godward as well as brotherward. It is the partnership of mutual Christian faith and life. It is upon Philemon's acceptance of this fellowship that Paul bases his appeal.*
 - d. Paul's desired that Philemon receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul.
 - 1) *receive* is the word for *welcome*. Philemon is to welcome Onesimus.
 - 2) The verb form is imperative, a command. Paul reached the point where he commanded Philemon to welcome Onesimus.
 - 3) G. Osborne, *Paul is asking Philemon to extend fellowship to Onesimus and so become a "partner" or coworker with him as well. The two have become not only "dear brothers" in Christ but also sharers in the kingdom ministry. On this basis Philemon is to give Onesimus exactly the same reception he would show Paul.*
 - 2. Paul offered to repay any debt owed Philemon by Onesimus (18-19), ***If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it - to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.***
 - a. Paul wrote himself that he would repay Philemon for any wrong done to him by Onesimus.
 - 1) With his own hand, Paul offered repayment on behalf of Onesimus.
 - 2) This was a general statement since it is believed that Paul did not know of any specific offense other than running away.
 - a) often, slaves stole money and goods from their master to finance an escape.
 - b) It might have been the loss of Onesimus' services due to his escape.
 - 3) Paul beautifully illustrates imputation.
 - a) This is a legal term whereby God forgives man based on Christ's payment. Christ's righteousness is placed on the account of those who put trust in Christ alone.
 - b) 2 Corinthians 5:21, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
 - 4) Paul wanted there to be no reason why Philemon would not welcome Onesimus.

- b. Paul declared that Philemon owed Paul his new life in Christ.
 - 1) The last part of verse 19 is in a parenthesis in some translations.
 - 2) Philemon had become a Christian through Paul's ministry.
 - a) Paul was delicately trying to emphasize a point without being overbearing.
 - b) Whatever Onesimus took from Philemon couldn't compare to what Philemon had received from Paul, 1 Corinthians 4:15, *For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*
 - c) E. Deibler, *...this was further evidence that Onesimus and Philemon were on the same spiritual plane; they had both been led to the Savior by the apostle.*
 - 3) G. Osborne, *Paul is not seeking to collect, and neither should Philemon. Both are ruled by Christian love and mercy, and all debts are to be cancelled—a Christian Jubilee!*
3. Paul wanted Philemon to demonstrate his appreciation for Paul (20), ***Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.***
 - a. Paul spoke of hoping to receive benefit by Philemon's response to Paul's request concerning Onesimus.
 - 1) The Greek root word for benefit is the root word for Onesimus, as well. H. Moule translated this clause, *Let me get help as well as you get Helpful.*
 - 2) G. Osborne, *On the basis of all the previous times Paul has benefitted from their friendship, he would appreciate one more favor—that Onesimus be forgiven and reinstated. All three parties will share in the "benefit": Philemon will have back his slave and new "brother," Onesimus will be reconciled both to God and to his earthly master, and Paul will hopefully receive back his new associate (perhaps as a free man) to once again help him in the ministry.*
 - 3) Paul emphasized that any benefits derived from this situation are due to the Lord Who brought Paul, Philemon and Onesimus into a relationship of grace.
 - b. Paul declared that Philemon's positive response would refresh his heart.
 - 1) According to Paul in verse seven, Philemon refreshed the hearts of the saints and Paul is asking Philemon to refresh his heart, as well.
 - 2) Paul said that his heart would be refreshed *in Christ*.
 - a) Jesus Christ is behind the request because reconciliation is God's best for us which bore a cost for Jesus when He reconciled you and me to the Father. Romans 5:10, *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*
 - b) G. Osborne, *...the refreshing for which Paul yearns will happen based on Philemon's willingness to "refresh" Onesimus, by reconciling and reinstating him both personally and spiritually.*
 - c) K. Larson, *He desired that Philemon follow through based on all Paul had written - understanding the full implications of God's grace within the community of believers, their partnership in Christ's kingdom, and the transformation that Onesimus had experienced.*
4. Paul was confident that Philemon would do what was right (21), ***Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.***
 - a. Paul was confident that Philemon would obey the leading of the Lord.
 - 1) Some believe Paul was strengthening his request by speaking of obedience.
 - 2) I believe Paul was not speaking of obedience to Paul but to Christ.
 - a) Paul declared Jesus as *Lord* in verses 3, 5, 16, and 20.
 - b) G. Osborne, *...the decision regarding Onesimus centers on that lordship. Because he is confident Philemon will follow the will of God, Paul has no doubt about the outcome of his appeal.*
 - b. Paul believed Philemon would do even more than what was asked of him.
 - 1) His request to Philemon was that he receive Onesimus as if he were Paul, to treat him as a brother in Christ, not as an unfaithful slave.
 - 2) Paul's thought may have included manumission, freeing Onesimus from slavery. K. Larson, *If he had commanded Philemon to release Onesimus, this would have spread through all the churches as apostolic command, causing social upheaval and a disintegration of the core gospel message.*
 - 3) Also, Paul may have had in mind the possibility of Onesimus being sent back to Rome to serve Paul and the ministry.
 - 4) K. Larson, *All of us have built a reputation for ourselves based on our patterns of action. Paul's confidence speaks a great deal of Philemon's reputation for love, reasonableness, obedience and generosity.*

B. Conclusion (22-25)

1. Paul's personal request (22), *At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.*
 - a. Paul believed he would be released from house arrest in Rome.
 - 1) He was confident that his release was necessary because of the need to strengthen the churches in Asia and Macedonia, Philippians 1:25-26, *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.*
 - 2) K. Larson, *His restoration to the believers in Colosse was for their good, their further spiritual development. In all issues of life, Paul exhibited that same quality of Christ which sought not his own advantage, but that of the Father.*
 - b. He solicited their prayers for his release because he believed that God answers prayer.
 - 1) *Your prayers* is plural
 - 2) Paul was asking for prayer not only from Philemon but all those mentioned in Philemon 1-2.
 - 3) K. Larson, *Paul's hope for release came not because of political maneuverings in Rome, but because his friends a thousand miles away were praying.*
 - c. He was released but it is unknown whether he went to Colossae.
2. Greetings from fellow workers (23-24), *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.*
 - a. Epaphras
 - 1) He was from Colossae and was instrumental in founding the church there, Colossians 1:7, *just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf*
 - 2) Paul called him a servant or slave of Jesus Christ which is high praise from Paul.
 - 3) He intensely prayed that they would mature in their faith.
 - a) *struggling* means to strive with intensity; to put forth every effort.
 - b) T. Constable, *His concern for the Colossians is clear from his zealous prayers for their maturity and their full perception of God's complete will for them.*
 - c) M. Anders, *For Epaphras prayer was not a game, it was a battle. He prayed continually, fervently, and with purpose. Aware of what the Colossians were facing, he knew their need was to grow to maturity in Christ in order to continue to resist the alluring lies of the false teachers.*
 - d) H. Lees, *Epaphras grasped, what many of us are slow to realize, that the tactics of the Christian battle are born of the strategy of prayer.*
 - b. Mark
 - 1) This is John Mark, cousin of Barnabas, who had traveled with Paul on his first missionary journey but left Paul, note Acts 12:25; 13:5, 13.
 - 2) He eventually rejoined Paul in Rome, 2 Timothy 4:11, *Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.*
 - 3) He wrote the Gospel of Mark.
 - 4) Johnson, *John Mark is an encouragement to everyone who has failed in his first attempts to serve God. He did not sit around and sulk. He got back into the ministry and proved himself faithful to the Lord and to the Apostle Paul.*
 - c. Aristarchus
 - 1) He was from Thessalonica, Acts 20:4, *Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus.*
 - 2) He had served with Paul in Ephesus, Acts 19:29, *So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.*
 - 3) He accompanied Paul to Rome, Acts 27:2, *And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.*
 - 4) *my fellow prisoner* is considered by most to refer to Aristarchus as a prisoner (servant) of God instead of a prisoner of Caesar, Philemon 23, *Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,*

- d. Demas
 - 1) He ministered to and with Paul during imprisonment.
 - 2) Later, Demas deserted Paul, 2 Timothy 4:10, *For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica...*
 - 3) G. Osborne, *It is possible that the prospect of losing his life for Christ terrified Demas, who chose life in this world over death for the Lord.*

- e. Luke
 - 1) It is believed that Luke was converted at Troas and soon joined Paul's team on his first voyage to Europe. He was left behind at Philippi and rejoined him six years later on Paul's journey to Jerusalem. Then, Luke went with Paul to Rome and his imprisonment, 2 Timothy 4:11, *Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.*
 - 2) He wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, more New Testament material than all of Paul's letters combined.
 - 3) By tradition, Luke was one of the 72, Luke 10:1, *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.*
 - 4) Some believe Luke was the anonymous disciple on the Emmaus Road, Luke 24:13, *That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,*

3. Paul's benediction (25), ***The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.***

- a. Paul began and ended his letter with a request that they receive grace, God's unmerited favor.
- b. *Your* is plural so Paul's benediction is for the entire church mentioned in verses one and two.
- c. *Spirit* refers to one's inner spiritual self.
 - 1) Paul desired that the grace of Jesus Christ fill their *spirits* (the seat of one's insight, feeling, and will).
 - 2) Note Galatians 6:18, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen*