

April 23, 1995

"Prison Letters - Philemon"
Review and Philemon

Couples Class
Wendell Alford,
Teacher

I. Past Studies:

- A. Matthew December, 1991 - June, 1992
- B. Acts June, 1992 - March, 1993
- C. Romans March, 1993 - July, 1993
- D. Biblical personages - Adam and Eve through Jesus our Lord
August, 1993 - December 1993
- E. Hebrews January, 1994 - April, 1994
- F. I and II Thessalonians and Jude
May, 1994 - June, 1994
- G. Isaiah July, 1994 - March, 1995
- H. Paul's Prison Letters
April, 1995 +

See words of scripture about heart

II. Four dedicated believers in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior left Rome in about 62 AD for the Roman Province of Asia which area was called Asia Minor at that time. Today we call the same area Turkey. These four men had come to love and trust the direction of a Roman prisoner being held in jail, because he had appealed under Roman law directly to the Caesar who was at that time Nero, Acts 25:11; 26:32. The quartet of believers had each been given a letter by the prisoner to carry back to their home towns, one each to Philippi and Ephesus, and two to Colosse. Epaprotitus was from Philippi (Phili. 4:18), Tychicus from Ephesus (Eph. 6:21), and Epaphras (Col. 4:12) and Onesimus, the runaway slave, were from Colosse (Philem. 10). Paul, God's especially chosen apostle, was entrusting these four with some of the most precious words ever written, for they were a portion of God's communication to all mankind. The originals have long since gone with the wind, but God's Holy Spirit from their beginning intended that they become a part of God's Word which will not return to God without accomplishing God's eternal purpose, Isa. 55:11. Through the years since Paul wrote these words, many have claimed to be the exclusive instruments of preserving, interpreting, and passing on God's Word, but only God's Holy Spirit should be recognized as having made that Word always available and meaningful to all those who receive Jesus Christ as Savior, John 14:26; 15:26. Today some say that they are authorized to claim exclusive credit for the authority of God's Word and have even created a bureaucracy which alone can properly manage and interpret God's Word. Jesus said that it would be God's Holy Spirit who would make believers knowledgeable and free, John 8:34-36; 14:26; Gal. 5:1. These four letters of the Apostle Paul are God's presentation of God's Savior, Jesus Christ; Christ's body, all believers during the "acceptable year of the Lord," Isa. 61:2; and the way that members of Christ's body should relate to one another. The letters reveal that those who are trusting Jesus Christ should live exemplary lives as distinct from those who do not trust the Lord. Ephesians presents believers as the Lord's body, the invisible body of which Jesus Christ is the Head. Colossians demonstrates Christ as the Head of the body, i.e., all believers. Philippians shows how all believers should lean upon (trust) Jesus for direction and strength for Christian living on a daily basis, Philip.

see Col. 4:12

math. 20:24-28; I Cor. 3:17

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4:13. Philemon outlines a dimension of how believers should love one another, even contrary to the main social order at any given time in history. Freedom of slaves did not occur in this nation until political force commanded it to be so late in the nineteenth century. At that time many believing slave owners acquiesced to a higher moral level. Further, that freeing of black slaves in the USA and the sending of believers of the Gospel around the world, has, in my opinion, caused those who have been enslaved by others to rise up and demand their own freedom.* But Paul expected believers to relate to their slaves as members of the same family, because the Lord Jesus had said, "If the Son of God shall set you free, you shall be free indeed," John 8:36. I believe that people will never be completely free until Jesus comes again and establishes his long promised Kingdom of God. We believers are indeed free now through the grace of God through his righteousness and our trust in Jesus' sacrifice for us, but we strive in an imperfect world order to serve a holy God. Strive as we may, we cannot achieve the lives we long for, even as Paul relates in Rom. 7; 8:23; II Cor. 5:2-4.

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III. The letter to the believers in Colosse and the letter to the slave owner of Onesimus who lived in Colosse are closely related to one another. The immediate reason for Paul's writing to Colossian believers was the arrival of Epaphras in Rome with news which disturbed Paul. The group there were faced with and were wavering toward modifying the Gospel which Paul had delivered to them. (We will think more about this heresy when we begin a look at the Colossian letter on May 28, 1995, the Lord permitting.) However, Paul's fellowshiping with Onesimus, the runaway slave whose master lived in Colosse, could have raised Paul's interest in what was happening there. The short letter of Paul to Philemon is unique among the writings of Paul in that it is the only strictly private letter preserved and included in the New Covenant. It does not deal with any question of general interest except as one would consider human slavery as an institution. Paul communicated directly with the slave owner Philemon about the changed status of his slave Onesimus. Onesimus was not only the property of Philemon now, but both slave and owner now had become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ through the same witness, Paul. The letter reveals Paul's practical approach to the problems associated with a slave escaping from his master. First, Paul offered to reimburse Philemon for the fiscal loss due to Onesimus' absence. Second, Paul made clear that, although Philemon had lost the service of Onesimus, the slave had become a servant to the Lord by helping Paul in his service there in Rome. Paul cited his own imprisonment and advanced age as reasons for Onesimus' practical help for him. Paul told Philemon, in effect, that, just as Philemon had lost Onesimus' physical service, now Paul, in returning the slave back to Philemon, was losing Onesimus' spiritual service in God's Kingdom work. Personally, I have an intense desire to know what happened when Onesimus handed Paul's letter to Philemon. Did he read the letter and embrace his newly reborn brother in Christ? That Paul expected such a reunion of the two is expressed in vs. 21. "The reason I write this letter is that I know that you will do more than I have expected."

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I. Four dedicated believers in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior left Rome in about 62 AD for the Roman Province of Asia which area was called Asia Minor at that time. Today we call the same area Turkey. These four men had come to love and trust the direction of a Roman prisoner being held in jail, because he had appealed under Roman law directly to the Caesar who was at that time Nero, Acts 25:11; 26:32. The quartet of believers had each been given a letter by the prisoner to carry back to their home towns, one each to Philippi and Ephesus, and two to Colosse. Epaproditus was from Philippi (Phili. 4:18), Tychicus from Ephesus (Eph. 6:21), and Epaphras (Col. 4:12) and Onesimus, the runaway slave, were from Colosse (Philem. 10). Paul, God's especially chosen apostle, was entrusting these four with some of the most precious words ever written, for they were a portion of God's communication to all mankind. The originals have long since gone with the wind, but God's Holy Spirit from their beginning intended that they become a part of God's Word which will not return to God without accomplishing God's eternal purpose, Isa. 55:11. Through the years since Paul wrote these words, many have claimed to be the exclusive instruments of preserving, interpreting, and passing on God's Word, but only God's Holy Spirit should be recognized as having made that Word always available and meaningful to all those who receive Jesus Christ as Savior, John 14:26; 15:26. Today some say that they are authorized to claim exclusive credit for the authority of God's Word and have even created a bureaucracy which alone can properly manage and interpret God's Word. Jesus said that it would be God's Holy Spirit who would make believers knowledgeable and free, John 8:34-36; 14:26; Gal. 5:1. These four letters of the Apostle Paul are God's presentation of God's Savior, Jesus Christ; Christ's body, all believers during the "acceptable year of the Lord," Isa. 61:2; and the way that members of Christ's body should relate to one another. The letters reveal that those who are trusting Jesus Christ should live exemplary lives as distinct from those who do not trust the Lord. Ephesians presents believers as the Lord's body, the invisible body of which Jesus Christ is the Head. Colossians demonstrates Christ as the Head of the body, i.e., all believers. Philippians shows how all believers should lean upon (trust) Jesus for direction and strength for Christian living on a daily basis, Philip. 4:13. Philemon outlines a dimension of how believers should love one another, even contrary to the main social order at any given time in history. Freedom of slaves did not occur in this nation until political force commanded it to be so late in the nineteenth century. At that time many believing slave owners acquiesced to a higher moral level. Further, that freeing of black slaves in the USA and the sending of believers of the Gospel around the world, has, in my opinion, caused those who have been enslaved by others to rise up and demand their own freedom. But Paul expected believers to relate to their slaves as members of the same family, because the Lord Jesus had said, "If the Son of God shall set you free, you shall be free indeed," John 8:36. I believe that people will never be completely free until Jesus comes again and establishes

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