

Bible Study # 26

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Outline of the Letter of Saint Paul to Philemon

- **1. Opening Address (1-3)**
- **2. Thanksgiving for Philemon (4-7)**
- **3. Paul's Appeal for Onesimus (8-22)**
- **4. Closing Greetings and Benediction (23-25)**
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Background

- This is the last of the books that are known without doubt to have been written by Paul (three times he identifies himself as the author)
- It is one of his personal letters listed in the New Testament from the longest to the shortest
 - 1st Timothy
 - 2nd Timothy
 - Philemon
 - Titus
 - It is also a **captivity letter**, most likely written in Rome and delivered by *Onesimus* to *Philemon* in Colossae

Background (Cont)

- *Philemon* was a citizen of *Colossae* and Paul may have been directly responsible for his conversion to Christianity
- Once converted he opened his home for a “house church”
- *Onesimus* was one of *Philemon’s* slaves who, after taking some of his master’s property, ran away to Rome where he eventually met up with Paul
- After *Onesimus’* conversion to the Faith Paul decided to send him, along with *Tychicus*, back to a slave owner named *Philemon*, and *Apphia* (possibly his wife), and *Archippus* (possibly his son) in *Colossae* with this letter and the letter to the *Colossians*

Purpose of the Letter

- It is an impassioned appeal to Philemon, urging him to welcome back one of his runaway slaves, *Onesimus*
- Formally *Onesimus* was a **useless** slave who not only deserted his master but may have stolen money or property from him
- In the meantime he became a Christian through an encounter with Paul
- The Apostle is now sending him back to his owner Philemon, asking that he be received no longer as a bondservant, but as a beloved brother in Christ
- Paul is also asking that preparation be made for his own arrival pending his expected release from prison

Philemon

- **Philemon 1:1-7** *“Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,...because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.”*
 - Paul was following his usual introduction, including a small “thanksgiving section”
 - He was painting *Philemon* as being a very great guy since he had opened his home as a “house church”
 - He was most likely wealthy as he owned slaves and a house big enough to serve as a meeting place for the community of Christians
 - Paul spoke of him as being benevolent and one who helped and encouraged the “saints”
 - He was an all around “great guy” (this was said by Paul for a reason)

Philemon (Cont)

- **Philemon 1:8-10** *“Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ... whose father I have become in my imprisonment.”*
 - Paul presents an interesting situation here as he says that he could have commanded *Philemon* to take *Onesimus* back
 - But since he was a great lover of people, Paul appealed to him rather than command him
 - Paul was also reminding *Philemon* that he, Paul, was bound by chains
 - It sounds as though *Onesimus* was not a Christian when he fled *Colossae*

Philemon (Cont)

- At this point Paul calls *Onesimus* his “child” meaning that Paul had “fathered him in Christ”
- Paul often used that language when talking about Christians that he converted like some of the *Corinthians* (*2nd Cor 6:18*)
- He also used that language in reference to *Timothy* who was a Christian long before Paul met him
- At this point *Onesimus* is a disciple of Paul who had been his principle teacher in the Faith

Philemon (Cont)

- **Philemon 1:11-14** “(Formerly he was useless to you, ...in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will.”
 - *Onesimus* means “useful” which might have been the name his master had given him “O useful one”
 - In Greek there is a play on words here with the “useful one” who became the “un-useful one” (a runaway slave)
 - Paul was telling *Philemon* that *Onesimus* was now useful to him
 - Paul wanted *Philemon* to know that he would have been happy to keep *Onesimus* with him in Rome to help out as Mark and Luke had been doing
 - But, Paul decided to send him back in hopes that *Philemon* would give him his freedom on his own accord

Philemon (Cont)

- **Philemon 1:15-18** *“Perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while,...or owes you anything, charge that to my account.”*
 - Paul sent him back because he was, according to the law of the Empire, legally *Philemon's* slave
 - *Philemon* continued to have rights over him
 - But Paul announced that he was now his “brother in Christ”
 - Paul was saying that if *Onesimus*, showed up and knocked on *Philemon's* door he should respond in the same way he would if Paul knocking on the door

Philemon (Cont)

- **Philemon 1:19-25** *“I, Paul, write this of my own hand,...The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”*
 - Even though *Onesimus* may have caused his master some form of loss, Paul indicated that he was willing to repay it
 - Again, Paul was not telling *Philemon* what to do but he was confident that he would do the right thing
 - He also told him that he, Paul, was hoping to come and check on him soon

Philemon (Cont)

- This is a very important letter for us to study as we can see this same message in Paul's letters to the *Philippians* and *Colossians* with regard to him talking about husbands loving their wives, masters being nice to their slaves, and slaves being good to their masters
- Paul is not endorsing slavery or saying that it is a good thing
- Instead in this personal letter Paul is reminding a slave master what he believes he should do to a "Christian slave"
- We do not know what Paul thought about "non-Christians slaves"
- But as the very least a slave master should remember that they also had "God in heaven" who was a master over them

Philemon (Cont)

- In fact they should act towards their slaves as they would hope God would act toward them – that is, be charitable and loving no matter who they were
- Paul’s attitude towards Christian slaves is that they should be freed
- This is a very important epistle for us even though it is a short personal letter as it helps clarify the passages in Paul other epistles where he talks about a “master to slave” relationship
- Sometimes people have misused this letter to defend slavery by claiming that since Paul was aware of slavery he supported it

Philemon (Cont)

- When they do this they misuse Paul's teachings and completely ignore the message of the letter to *Philemon*
- Every time you come across Paul's reference to this relationship between slaves and masters make a note to yourself to go back and look at *Philemon*
- Father Sebastian also said that Paul did not accept slavery because the "end justified the means"
- This is not so because the "end" can "never justify the means"

Transition

- We will next look at the last three personal letters of Paul:
 - Titus
 - 1st Timothy
 - 2nd Timothy

Pastoral Epistles

Titus

1st and 2nd Timothy

Background for the Pastoral Letters

- We are not sure exactly what happened to Paul between his release from his first imprisonment and his second imprisonment in Rome
- Many believe that he traveled to Spain as he had so often indicated that he wanted to do
- Although there is no record of a trip to Spain, there are references from the early church discussing his travels during this period
- Based on his pastoral letters it looks like during this period that he did travel as far south as **Crete** where he left **Titus** as bishop and then to **Ephesus** where he left **Timothy** as bishop

Background for the Pastoral Letters (Cont)

- It is believed that he then went to ***Macedonia*** (and most likely to ***Philippi***) where he wrote a letter to **Titus** and one to **Timothy (1st Timothy)**
- Sometime after this he was arrested and again imprisoned in *Rome* where he most likely wrote his **2nd Timothy**

Paul's Letter to Titus

Saint Titus

- *Titus* was a Greek (Gentile) apparently from *Antioch* who was converted to Christianity by Paul
- Paul brought him to the “Council of Jerusalem” in 50 AD (Gal 2:1-3; Acts 15:1-35)
- Paul refused to have him circumcised to justify the Jews in Jerusalem (although he had circumcised Timothy earlier to make him acceptable to the Jews in Galicia)
- *Titus* was an early Christian missionary, Church leader, and disciple of Paul
- He is mentioned nine times in 2nd Cor as Paul’s delegate to the Christians in ***Corinth***

Purpose of the Letter to Titus

- Paul's letter to **Titus** was probably written between 63 and 66 AD (after his first Roman imprisonment (60-62 AD) and before his death in 67 AD)
- It was sent to **Titus** on the Mediterranean **Island of Crete**
- Although **Crete** had an established Jewish community, its inhabitants were mostly Gentile pagans who were infamous for their moral decadence

Purpose of the Letter (Cont)

- It is possible that the Church in *Crete* had been established earlier by some Jewish Christians who came from Jerusalem bringing the faith to the Jewish community of *Crete* prior to the arrival of **Paul** or **Titus**
- **Paul** and **Titus** had previously evangelized parts of the island together, but Paul left **Titus** behind while he continued his travels into Asia
- **Titus** was charged by **Paul** with organizing the converts into communities and ensuring that elders or **presbyters** (priests) were appointed to lead each flock

Purpose of the Letter (Cont)

- **Paul** wrote this letter to encourage ***Titus*** and to authorize his spiritual and organizational efforts
- He placed full confidence in ***Titus*** who had previously proven himself a capable delegate in even the most sensitive situation in ***Corinth***
- The plan was for ***Titus*** to rejoin Paul in ***Nicopolis*** in the winter of his fifth journey (63-67 AD) after he had fulfilled this mission and been relieved by a replacement

Purpose of the Letter (Cont)

- Paul gave pastoral directives for the various status of Christian life in the community to include: older men, older women, younger men, slaves, and all Christians
- He grounded his counsels in the “redeeming grace of Christ,” who gave himself in order for his people to become holy
- These counsels build to a climax in a hymn that traces the saving plan of God from baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to the hope that leads to eternal life
- Although this is the shortest of the three pastoral letters, it provides a rich source of wisdom for all Christians

Outline of Paul's Letter to Titus

- **1. Opening Address (1:1-4)**
- **2. Christian Leadership (1:5-16)**
 - A. Appointing Shepherds in Crete (1:5)
 - B. Qualifications for Pastors (1:6-9)
 - C. The Problem of False Teachers (1:10-16)

Outline of Paul's Letter to Titus (Cont)

- **3. Christian Living (2:1-3:11)**
 - A. Instruction for All Ages (2:1-10)
 - B. Foundation of the Christian Commitment (2:11-15)
 - C. Life with and without Christ (3:1-7)
 - D. Avoiding Trouble and Troublemakers (3:8-11)
- **4. Conclusion (3:12-15)**
 - A. Final Instructions (3:12-14)
 - B. Benediction (3:15)

Titus 1

- **Titus 1:1-4** “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ,...Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior
 - At this point, *Titus* was in *Crete* after he traveled with Paul before Paul moved on to *Macedonia*
 - It contains portions of Paul’s “standard introduction”*

Titus 1

- **Titus 1:5-9** “This is why I left you in Crete,... also to confute those who contradict it”
 - Elders were the *Presbuteros* meaning priests or “clergy”
 - This is usually translated “clergy” because we are not exactly sure when “priests” were added to the two ecclesiastical offices of Bishop and Deacon
 - Paul expected *Titus* to travel throughout the island as its main “apostle” or “bishop”
 - He was to govern the entire church on the island and make sure that all the smaller churches in the various towns were properly staffed with clergy

Titus 1 (Cont)

- Up until around the 4th Century, Bishops tended to be married
- After that, we find fewer and fewer Bishops being married as most were celibate
- The priests, however, especially in the Eastern Church, were and are allowed to marry
- There have always been married priests in the Western Church
- But, after the 10th century, it was only permitted under special circumstances
- Today in the West, many married Anglican ministers have converted to the Catholic Faith and are allowed to serve as priests
- This group may grow larger in times ahead*

Titus 1 (Cont)

- **Titus 1:10-16** “For there are many insubordinate men,... unfit for any good deed.”
 - Again we see that Paul really did not like the members of the “Circumcision Party”
 - Based on the proximity of *Crete* to *Asia Minor* it is easy to see how these Judaizers came to *Crete* to refute Paul’s teaching among these Christians
 - Paul gives *Titus* a very strong admonition to silence (literally muzzle, or gag) those deceivers within the Christian community

Titus 1 (Cont)

- Paul does not tell him how to do this but advises that he could use a series of interventions from an admonition to excommunication
- Paul insists that *Titus* must exercise his authority decisively as this was a serious threat to the Church as it impacted on households (whole families) which were the pillar of the community
- It seems as though these teachers were motivated by sordid gain

Titus 1 (Cont)

- The *Cretans* had a reputation for greed and dishonesty, for being an island of pirates who considered piracy and brigandage honorable
- Paul directed *Titus* to admonish them sharply
- The regulations of people (precepts of men) most likely referred to some of the Jewish ceremonial practices (Jesus referred to some of these as “human precepts” (Mk 7:7)*)

Titus 2

- **Titus 2:1-10** “But as for you,... so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior”
 - Paul purposefully wrote these statements to avoid Christianity from becoming a major threat to the culture
 - If Christianity suddenly caused slaves to run away from their masters, one would not convert a large number of people within the empire
 - But, if every time someone (slave or master) became a Christian (and slaves became better servants and masters became more loving toward their slaves), many would be attracted to this way of life
 - Thus, if those who became Christian began to do what the Faith called them to do, they would be living examples of the Gospel *

Titus 2 (Cont)

- **Titus 2:11-15** “For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men,...let no one disregard you.”
 - Paul makes an abrupt switch from speaking of the “virtues” to addressing the “grace of God”
 - “Grace” appears 60 times in Paul’s letters
 - The significance of this “grace” is that it offers eternal salvation – saving all
 - This does not mean that everyone will be automatically saved, but because God desires to save all people, salvation is now available to all, Jew and Gentile alike

Titus 2 (Cont)

- In the Old Testament, “training” most often meant “educating (disciplining) children in the Law of God”
- Such discipline was something that God Himself did for His “children”
- Some believe that Paul may also be referring to the severe physical discipline accompanying education in the Greek world and by this he was implying that the “cross and suffering” were the way Christians were “trained”
- He is also speaking of “grace that educates” as something that comes from God’s love rather than from His commandments or trials

Titus 2 (Cont)

- Paul hoped that this would bring the believer to a decisive rejection of the opposite of grace - godless ways and worldly desires which were major characteristics of pagan life
- Having evoked the future, Paul now evokes the past which reminded them of Jesus giving Himself up for them
- The price of their liberation was the “blood of Jesus” which cleansed them from sin and claimed a people to Himself
- Paul also reminds them that they should not presume on this “grace,” but should be eager to do what is “good” (that is to pursue good works)

Titus 2 (Cont)

- Following his style elsewhere, Paul concludes this section with an exhortation to transmit these teachings to the faithful
- He wants Titus to use the authority given to him like a good parent correcting or reprimanding his children who deviate from the truth of the gospel or its disciplines*

Titus 3

- **Titus 3:1-2** “Remind them to be submissive to rules and authorities,...and to show perfect courtesy toward all men.”
 - Again, this is what Christians were supposed to do in all walks of life including the marketplace, business or in buying and selling
 - This applied to slave masters, citizens, politicians, church leaders or the laity
 - Whatever their position they were to be models of charity, honesty, and patience which were images of Christ
 - If all the followers did these things, they would convert droves to the Faith*

Titus 3 (Cont)

- **Titus 3:3-7** *“For we ourselves were once foolish,.. So that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.”*
 - Paul was reminding *Titus* how the pagans were acting before they became Christians
 - In this context, the teachings of the “works of the law” could be understood as “deeds done by us in righteousness” which included circumcision, kosher laws etc.

Titus 3 (Cont)

- Look at the water language that follows in this section
- Paul reminds them that they are saved by baptism, “washing of regeneration”
- “Grace” here means “free gift” and is not based on something that one did on his own*

Titus 3 (Cont)

- **Titus 3:8-15** “The saying is sure....Grace be with you all.”
 - Paul made a stark contrast between the concept of “good works” and “works of righteousness” or “works of the Law”
 - These “good works” (deeds) are the things one does as a Christian that confirm your call to election
 - They are steps one takes in following in the footsteps of Jesus
 - Paul was calling them to walk in Christ’s body and do His works
 - Thus, following the “works of the Law” would not be good for these Christians of *Crete*

Titus 3 (Cont)

- This was all part of Paul's teaching on "salvation through baptism"
- Baptism is a free gift (something given to them)
- When they came out of the baptismal font they did not do anything for God because He did it all for them
- Eternal life was given to them as a free gift
- After that, they were called to go about walking in the ways of Jesus in the glory of the Church

Titus 3 (Cont)

- These are the things Paul calls “good works”
- Good deeds, according to Father Sebastian, is a bad translation
- This letter can best be seen as a “cliff note” for Paul’s first letter to *Timothy*

Transition

- We will now turn our attention to Paul's First Letter to Timothy