

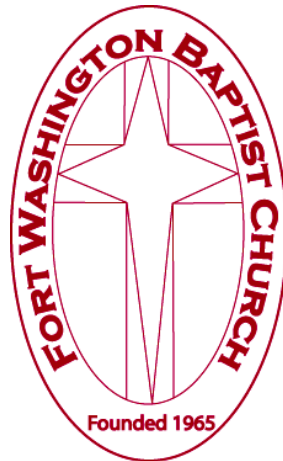
Fort Washington Baptist Church
Vacation Bible School 2024
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Vacation Bible School

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A Study on the Epistle to Philemon

“Do the Right Thing!”

Session II

What are we going to do in this Session?



- Welcome & Greetings
- Opening Prayer
- Purpose & Objectives of Session II
- Review Session I
- Study Outline Points I-III
- Answer discussion questions throughout the study

Close in Prayer

Purpose & Objectives of Session II



The purpose of Session II is to review key points from Session I, work through the Outline points I-III, and finally answer discussion questions based on what was gleaned from Philemon.

Philemon **“Do the Right Thing** **What is proper toward One Another!”**

Key points from Session I:

- In Session I we learned the Historical Context of the letter to Philemon, that the authors of the epistle were Paul and Timothy. Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke were with Paul and Timothy when the letter was written. Paul, an old man at the time, wrote the letter from a prison cell.
- The recipients of this epistle were Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Philemon’s house.
- The letter was written on behalf of Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave, who became a believer through the ministry of the Apostle Paul, and who ministered to the Apostle in his imprisonment.
- Both Philemon and Onesimus became believers through the teaching and preaching of the Gospel by the Apostle Paul.

- Paul wrote the letter asking Philemon to charge to Paul's account any loss he suffered through Onesimus, saying that Onesimus, who was now a believer, was no longer just a slave, but he was now Philemon's brother through Christ.
- Paul wanted Philemon to treat Onesimus with love, to welcome Onesimus back as a brother, to see that Onesimus was useful to him in his imprisonment and would also be useful to Philemon, to see that maybe Onesimus was separated from Philemon so that when he came back, he would come back as brother forever, much more than a slave.
- The key word in the letter is the Greek verb (ανηκο) pronounced "An-ee-ko," in verse 8 where it is translated "proper" in the New American Standard Bible (NASB), "fitting" in the New King James Version (NKJV), and "do what you ought to do" in the New International Version (NIV). All that was written in the letter was so that Philemon would know what he ought to do, what's proper, what's right, what's fitting concerning Onesimus.

Exegesis of Philemon

I. Do the right thing! Reach out to brothers and sisters in the family of God and church of Jesus Christ.
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a. Paul identified himself and Timothy as the authors of the letter (1)

Paul,
a prisoner
of Christ Jesus,
and Timothy
our brother,

The Apostle Paul and Timothy were the authors of this letter. Paul was a prisoner of Christ Jesus, that is, in prison for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ

(9, 13; Acts 22:1-30). Philemon was one of Paul's prison epistles, letters he wrote from a Roman jail cell (Rom. 28:30-31) along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

Paul informed Philmon that he wrote the letter with his own hand (19). If Paul wrote the letter with his own hand, what is the reason that Paul mentions Timothy writing, "Paul...and Timothy"? If Paul wrote the letter, what did Timothy contribute? Perhaps, while Paul wrote the letter, since Timothy was Paul's "true child in the faith" (I Tim. 1:2) whom Paul had circumcised and took with him on the mission field (Acts 16:1-4), it would not be surprising if Paul read this letter to Timothy and discussed the contents and tone of the letter. Maybe Timothy offered some input on the letter with the hope that upon reading it Philemon would receive it. After all, Paul wanted Philemon to treat his returning runaway slave as a brother.

Point: When corresponding on sensitive matters, having another set of eyes to see to read what's being communicated can be beneficial, especially when that someone is "a believer...well-spoken of" (Acts 16:1-2) and trustworthy to even oversee a congregation of believers (I Tim. 1:3). This was Timothy.

Think about it: Write the name of a trustworthy believer...well-spoken of, whom you communicate with about sensitive matters - confident that their counsel will be godly. Do you have anyone like this in your life?

b. Paul identified the recipients of the letter (2).

To Philemon

our beloved *brother*
and fellow worker (1),
and to Apphia
our sister,
and to Archippus
our fellow soldier,
and to the church
in your house (2):

Philemon was one of the recipients of the letter. Paul called him “Τὼ ἀγαπητῷ (pronounced *Toe a-ga-pee-toe*) “our beloved.” Ἀγαπητῷ is an adjective – which modifies a noun. In the Greek text, no noun is mentioned, just the adjective. Paul writes simply to “Philemon, our beloved.” However, Paul calls Philemon “brother,” in verses 9, 20. Therefore, in many translations, the noun “brother,” is included with the adjective in verse 1. Philmon was “a dear, a beloved brother of Paul, Timothy, and all the others cited in this letter (23-24). Through the blood of Christ, those who are not blood relatives, become family.

After Pentecost (Acts 2), Jewish believers now in Christ continued to gather in the Temple, as was their custom prior to coming to faith in Christ (Acts 2:46; 3:1). However, now, in the synagogues and the temple they preached Jesus as the Christ and the Savior (Acts 3:13-4:12). Believers were arrested, thrown in prison, and commanded to no longer preach the name of Christ (Acts 5:17-32). Emboldened by the Spirit of God, the believers declared “We must obey God rather than men” and kept preaching the resurrection of Jesus to the right hand of God, as Prince, Savior, and the means to forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:29-32). By time readers of Acts get to the 10th chapter, people who feared God had gathered in the house of Cornelius to hear the preaching of the Gospel by Peter (Acts 10:34-48). Quite possibly since neither the Temple nor the Synagogue is mentioned as the gathering place in Antioch, where believers were first called Christians, those believers were meeting at someone’s house (Acts 11:19-30). When Peter was arrested, believers gathered in Mary’s house for a prayer service, calling on God to intercede for Peter, and while they were praying, an Angel sent from heaven opened the prison doors, brought Peter out of the prison, and let him Mary’s house (Acts 12:11-17).

Philemon had a church in his house (2), Prisca and Aquila, fellow workers in Christ Jesus with the Apostle Paul, had a church that met in their house (Rom. 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19), and Nymphas in Laodicea had a church in his house (Col. 4:15). Believers gathered in the home of other believers and had church!

The letter was addressed to the leaders in that house church, those with authority to oversee the congregation and give guidance within that congregation. The letter was addressed to Apphia, their sister *in the Lord*, (only mentioned in

Philemon) and to Archippus, a fellow soldier, whom Paul encouraged to fulfill the ministry he received from the Lord in his letter to the Colossians (4:17).

For reasons not mentioned, Archippus needed encouragement to fulfill his ministry - maybe he did not believe he was called - maybe he was reluctant to walk in his call - maybe he was fearful. What we know is that in the letter to Philemon, Archippus was identified with Philemon and with Apphia showing that he was in leadership – maybe now fulfilling the ministry that the Lord called him to. Paul addressed the letter to Archippus as one who stepped up to walk in his call. Praise God!

Paul was a Jew, circumcised on the eighth-day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and as to the Law, a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5). In his letter to the Philippians, he never mentions that he was in the military, yet he calls Archippus, “our fellow soldier.” What branch of the military was Paul in? Paul was in the “Lord’s army,” called by Christ *“to open the eyes of people through the Gospel so they would turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in God”* (Acts 26:18).

Paul expressed to the Corinthian believers that in Christ, believers are in a war. He wrote,

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage battle according to the flesh, ⁴for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. ⁵*We are* destroying arguments and all arrogance raised against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, ⁶and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete” (2 Cor. 10:3-6).

Point:

Archippus was a fellow-soldier in this war. Every believer is a fellow soldier. Paul knew these believers. He was instrumental in their lives. He respected them and with Timothy addressed them as the respected leaders of the church that gathered

in Philemon's house. Quite possibly Paul's encouragement to Archippus is what he needed to walk in his call to leadership.

Questions always worth discussing:

- Is God calling you to do more than what you're doing?
- Has anyone encouraged you to fulfill God's call on your life – which they can see – but you may not have yet acknowledged?
- Have you encouraged anyone to walk in their calling?
- At this time, do you know what God is calling you to do? Are you doing it?

c. Paul gave his customary salutation/greeting to Philemon and those who were at the church in his house (3).

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

In his 2nd letter to the Corinthians (1:2), and his letters to the Galatians (1:3), to the Ephesians (1:2), to the Philippians (1:2), to the Colossians (1:2), to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2), Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2), and to Philemon, Paul gave this customary salutation or greeting. The pronoun "You," is written in the 2nd person plural, which means, "you all." The pronoun is written in the accusative case of the action. Paul wanted all of them, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus...the entire congregation to be the recipients of grace – God's unmerited favor and peace (with God through Christ and as a result with one another). In his salutation, Paul expresses great truths.

He writes that Jesus is Lord and Jesus is the Christ. As Lord, every knee shall bow to Jesus (Phil. 4:11). He is Lord over all! As Christ, Jesus is the Messiah, the One sent from God to accomplish our redemption through His death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 2:30-36). Paul also makes it clear that grace and peace are through God and Jesus Christ, showing that the same power that is in God is in Jesus Christ...showing the deity of Christ...what's in God

is in Christ. This salutation also expresses Jesus' equality with God. What God does, Jesus does! Jesus is equal with God. Jesus therefore is everything that God is.

The Apostle Paul wanted every congregation collectively and every believer individually to experience God's grace and God's peace in their life.

Point:

If you need grace, favor, for God to do something in your life to get you through what you're going through, just ask God and Christ for grace and until grace shows up...just ask God and Christ for peace. If the situation doesn't change – let peace change you!

Paul and Timothy reached out to these believers. They needed Paul to reach out to them. They all knew that Onesimus had runaway...what were they thinking...what were they planning to do? Paul knew he needed to reach out to them. When you know that a believer may be wondering what to do about some situation in their life, reaching out can help that believer determine what is the right thing to do. **Do the right thing! Reach out to brothers and sisters in the family of God and church of Jesus Christ.**

Question: Who do you need to reach out to? Who can use some encouragement to know the right thing to do?

II. Do the right thing! Pray for one another, encourage one another in faith and love towards the Saints, and refresh one another's heart (4-7).

a. Paul gave thanks to God mentioning Philemon in his prayers (4-5).

I thank my God always,
 making mention
 of you in my prayers (4),
because

I hear of your love
and of the faith
 which you have toward the Lord Jesus
 and toward all the saints; (5)

Paul had a relationship with believers in various churches, having covered a wide area with the Gospel on three missionary journeys, where he disciplined large numbers of people in the faith (Acts 13:1-2; 15:36-41; 18:23). Yet he remembered Philemon in his prayers, making mention of Philemon, thanking God for the ministry of Philemon, because he heard about Philemon's love for the saints and Jesus and Philemon's faith toward Jesus. Believers testified about Philemon. They saw both love and faith toward the Lord and the Saints in action. When Paul heard about Philemon, in his prayer time, he always gave thanks to God. Reading this must have encouraged Philemon's heart to know that people testified about his love and faith. It must have encouraged Philemon to know that Paul remembered him when he prayed and thanking God for him.

Questions:

- What does love and faith toward the Lord look like?
- What does love and faith toward the Saints look like?
- Who exemplifies love and faith toward the Lord and the Saints, that you remember in your prayers and give God thanks for?
- Who have you encouraged by letting them know that you give thanks to God for their love and faith toward the Lord and Saints? Who would you like to encourage?

b. Paul prayed for Philemon that the fellowship of faith that he shared with Paul would be effective for the sake of Christ (6).

and

I pray that the fellowship
of your faith may become effective
through the knowledge
of every good thing
which is in you
for the sake of Christ (6).

Even believers who demonstrate faith and love toward the Lord and Saints need prayer...maybe that they would be even more effective in the work of the ministry. Paul prayed for this on behalf of Philemon. No where else in Paul's letters does he write that he prayed for "the fellowship of your faith." Philemon's situation was unique and what Paul prayed reflected that.

In the Scriptures, fellowship is used in various contexts. The Psalmist was alarmed that his companion whom he enjoyed sweet "fellowship" with, now hated him (Ps. 55:12-14). After repenting and being baptized, the first believers devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to "fellowship" *with one another*, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Believers have been called into "fellowship" with Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9). In Paul's benediction, he wrote, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the "fellowship" of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14).

Fellowship was with the Psalmist and companions who now hated him, with converted believers, with Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit. Fellowship was always more than one in a close and intimate relationship with one another. Therefore, this fellowship Paul is referring to must mean, Philemon's fellowship in the faith *that is in Christ Jesus*, with other believers. As Philemon became aware of every good thing in him for Christ's sake it would cause the fellowship he had with other believers in the faith to be even more effective - that he would show love even more – that he would demonstrate faith in the Lord even more - especially in regard to Onesimus.

Everyone testified about the good inside of Philemon – his faith – his love. Was there good within Philemon that he needed to have knowledge of...that he was

unaware of...that this situation with Onesimus would reveal? Was there mercy in Philemon? Was there kindness in Philemon or patience or gentleness or compassion or understanding? Paul prayed that as Philemon became aware of good within him for the sake of Christ it would cause him to be even more effective in the fellowship of faith *with other believers*...especially Onesimus.

Point: Situations reveal what's within us! We would never know if love or faith or compassion or kindness or mercy or gentleness or patience or understanding is within us if situations did not reveal these things. Some situations are for our sake...so we can learn what's inside of us. A situation can also reveal if none of these things are within us. This situation clearly revealed what was in the Apostle Paul for Onesimus and for Philemon. Paul revealed his concern for both...that no hurt would come upon Onesimus and that his concern was for Philemon to become even more effective in his fellowship with others in the faith...that his love would prove evident for Onesimus.

Question:

- What are your current situations revealing about what is within you? Are they revealing that patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, love, and faith are within you or that you need prayer for more to be revealed within you?
 - When someone has done you wrong and caused you to lose wealth, what has that situation revealed about what is within you – anger – revenge – impatience or love – faith – kindness - understanding?
- c. **Paul expressed his joy that the hearts of the saints had been refreshed through Philemon's love (7).**

For I have had great joy
and comfort in your love,
because
the hearts of the saints
have been refreshed through you, brother (7).

Sometimes, we don't realize the impact of our love on others. Philemon's love benefitted the lives of more people than he realized. Paul was in prison but had great joy because of Philemon's love for the Saints. Paul was comforted because of Philemon's love. The noun *agape*, translated "love" is the same noun used to describe the love of God (Jn. 5:42). It's the love Jesus talked about when He said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have "love" for one another" (Jn. 13:35). It's the same love Jesus referenced when He said, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love" (Jn. 15:9) and "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (Jn. 15:10).

Philemon displayed a godly love, a Christlike love to the Saints, the love that revealed that he was a disciple of Jesus Christ. This is the kind of love that caused the hearts of the Saints to be (αναπαυο pronounce *an-ap-ow-o*) refreshed – that caused their hearts to be able to rest, to be able to calm down, to keep quiet, to be at peace, to not worry. Paul had great joy that Philemon displayed the kind of love for the Saints that cause their hearts to be able to rest – be refreshed...so much so...that Paul asked Philemon, what you did for others do for me, writing "yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; "refresh my heart" in Christ (20). Paul is saying, let me experience this love that others have experienced from you.

Paul had great joy that there was undeniable evidence of Philemon's godly love. His love made a difference in the lives of the Saints. Paul also wanted that love to make a difference in his life and the life of Onesimus.

Point: Do the right thing! Refresh one another's heart with godly love by doing that thing for others that they need to have done...that sometimes only you can do. Only Philemon could cancel the debt that Onesimus owed, take the financial loss, and refresh Paul's heart - only Philemon could do this. There are assignments in life that God appoints for you and only you...but sometimes it will cost you something...it will be test of your love and faith! **Do the right thing! Pray for one another, encourage one another in faith and love towards the Saints, and refresh one another's heart.**

III. Do the right thing! Appeal to those in Christ to do what is proper towards others in Christ (8-11).

a. Paul appealed to Philemon to do what is proper, not with authority, but for love's sake (8-9).

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ
to order you
to do what is proper (8),
yet for love's sake
I rather appeal *to you*—
since I am such a person as Paul,
an old man,
and now also a prisoner
of Christ Jesus (9)

The Apostle Paul used the verb translated “confidence” in verse 8 on several occasions. He used this verb to describe his confidence or boldness that he and others had because of their hope in Christ (2 Cor. 3:12). He used the verb to describe his confidence in the Corinthians that caused him to boast about them...confident that they would give to support the needy Saints (2 Cor. 7:4). He used it to describe the bold confidence we have to come to God through faith in Christ (Eph. 3:12) and the bold confidence he had of opening his mouth to make known the mystery of the Gospel (Eph. 6:19). Paul was confident, full of boldness in Christ, that through his imprisonment, Christ would be exalted in his body, whether he lived or died (Phil. 1:20).

Paul had enough boldness, enough confidence, enough authority to order Philemon to do what was proper toward Onesimus. Paul makes it clear to Philemon that anything the law gives him authority to do Onesimus for having runaway is not the proper thing to do - is not the right thing to do and he/Paul had enough boldness and authority to order him, to command him, to charge him to do what is proper

toward Onesimus. At this point in the letter, Philemon had no idea of what Paul believed was proper. He had no idea that Onesimus had been ministering to Paul, had become Paul's son, and was also his brother in Christ. He had no idea.

Rather than command him, Paul appeals to Philemon's godly love which had been displayed and testified about by many others. Paul was now an old man, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and at this stage felt it better to appeal to Philemon, not with authority but with love. Maybe, Paul has changed as he has aged and realized that it would be loving towards Philemon to appeal to his love rather than to command him, as though Paul doubted the authenticity of Philemon's love. Paul then gets the heart of the letter.

I appeal to you
for my son Onesimus,
whom I fathered
in my imprisonment (10),
who previously
was useless to you,
but now
is useful both to you
and to me (11).

Paul appealed to Philemon concerning Onesimus, Paul's son, who was with Paul in his imprisonment. Onesimus had changed and has now returned to Philemon different than when he had fled. He wasn't Paul's son when left...but now he is. He had not spent time with Paul before – at least it's not recorded – but after he fled, he was with Paul. He was not useful to Philemon when we was then, but now, upon his return, he would be useful to Philemon as he had been useful to Paul.

Philemon had no idea of what was proper to do concerning Onesimus other than carry out his legal liberties towards a runaway slave who had returned. As Philemon is reading this, more than likely handed to him from Onesimus, he reads what Paul writes. Paul interrupts whatever Philemon was thinking concerning Onesimus and opens his eyes to new things concerning Onesimus. He's Paul's son now. Paul cared about him. Paul loved him. How could Philemon carry out his

legal liberties against this returning runaway slave who was Paul's son. What is the right thing – the proper thing to do toward Onesimus, who is not only Paul's son, but because he's in Christ as Philemon is, is Philemon's brother?

Paul reminded Philemon of his love towards the Saints subtly suggesting to Philemon, that since Onesimus is now a Saint, a brother in the Lord, do for Onesimus what you have done for other saints - refresh his heart, treat him as you treated other saints - let his heart rest - let his heart be at peace - let his heart know that nothing painful will be done to him because of what he has done to you. Philemon had to get the message.

b. Paul appealed to Philemon *to do what was proper* toward his son Onesimus, that he was now useful to both Paul and Philemon (10-11).

Point: Whenever someone has done you wrong, has caused you to suffer loss, it would be wise to have someone like a Paul in your life, someone godly, who can help you overcome your emotions so that you can do what is right – what is proper concerning others. Sometimes we need someone else to help us see clearly as to what is the right thing to do. Other times, we need be the voice to tell a brother or sister in the Lord to do the right thing toward another who may have caused them pain, hurt, sorrow, and/lost. **Do the right thing! Appeal to those in Christ to do what is proper towards others in Christ.**