

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS
PHILEMON



PHILEMON
for growing
believers

Bible Study
Guide

Acknowledgm ents

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Progression Toward Maturity

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Detailed Explanation of Each Phase

Phase 1 – Foundation for Salvation - (“Creation to Christ”)

The Christian life is a relationship; therefore our desire is to lead our readers into a deep and intimate relationship with God. In order to grow into that level of relationship with God, there are foundational truths that must be clearly taught and understood. These foundational truths include the following;

- The attributes of God - His love, power, grace, omniscience, omnipotence, justice, immutability, hatred of sin, faithfulness.
- The sinfulness of man, his helplessness to save himself, and his need for a Savior.
- Only God can provide a way of salvation
- The Gospel.

Phase 2 – Foundation for Sanctification - (“Positioned in Christ” and “The New Birth Explained”)

The moment someone is born again, there is an immediate change of position that takes place in his or her life. At that very moment, one becomes a child of God, and is taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. All that Christ is, and all that Christ has, becomes ours. Therefore, before service to God is considered, one must be grounded in an understanding of who we are in Christ. Some important foundational truths that should be emphasized in phase 2 teaching, includes the following;

- Placed into Christ
- Justified (declared righteous) and accepted in Christ.
- Child of God
- Restored to oneness with God
- Eternally secure in Christ
- His Divine power has given to us all things pertaining to life and godliness through His finished work on the cross.
- Our part is to believe.

Phase 3 – Dependence upon the Spirit and introduction of the church – (“Acts for Growing Believers”)

The position change that takes place in every believer's life at salvation, is immediate and complete. The daily "living out" of that position, on the other hand, is a growth process. It is the progression of growth that the Holy Spirit is working all believers through in His process of conforming us to the image of Christ.

In order for believers to move on to maturity, we must learn to walk and depend upon the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our purpose in phase 3 teaching is to reveal the Holy Spirit's ministry, and His faithfulness to lead, guide, feed, and protect God's children, as well as to introduce the church. Some of the important foundational truths that should be emphasized include the following.

- The Holy Spirit's ministry to lead, guide, feed, protect, and establish us in truth.
- To emphasize the FAITHFULNESS of the Spirit to fulfill all that Jesus promised.
- To reveal the early church's dependence upon the Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is as faithful in our lives today, as He was to the early church in the book of Acts.
- Introduction of the church and her role.

Phase 4 – Practical sanctification; Identification with Christ; Conformed to the image of Christ – (“Romans to Revelation for Growing Believers,” Principles of Spiritual Growth, God’s Masterpiece the Cross of Christ,” and “Looking Unto Jesus” lessons.)

The Holy Spirit is teaching us to walk less in the flesh and more in the Spirit, with Christ becoming more and more the object of our hearts.

In phase 4, we will study through the epistles with the purpose of learning to rest in our identification with Christ and His finished work. As we, by faith, begin to appropriate identification truths, our co-crucifixion with Christ, our lives will become more and more conformed to the image of Christ, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit.

Some of the important truths that will be emphasized in Phase 4 includes the following.

- The believer's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. (Crucified with Him, and raised to newness of life)

- Sanctification is the process of walking less and less in the flesh and more and more in the Spirit.
- Our part in the process is faith in the finished work of Christ, and our identification with it.
- What it means to truly walk in the Spirit
- Putting off the old and putting on the new.
- Manifesting the life of Christ/ fruit of the Spirit.

Conclusion: Recommended Order of Study:

Being that there truly is a progression of growth that the Holy Spirit is taking all believers through, therefore our Bible lessons have been developed and arranged to line up with that work of the Spirit in our lives. Each set of lessons contain the foundational truths that must be in place in a person's heart in order to facilitate their growth unto the next stage of spiritual growth. Therefore, we believe that it is important to teach the lessons in the following order:

1. Creation to Christ
2. Positioned in Christ
3. *Acts for growing believers*
4. *Romans for growing believers*
5. *Ephesians for growing believers*
6. *1 Corinthians for growing believers*
7. *1 Timothy for growing believers*
8. *Titus for growing believers*
9. *1 & 2 Thessalonians for growing believers*
10. *Revelation for growing believers*
11. *Galatians for growing believers*
12. *Colossians for growing believers*

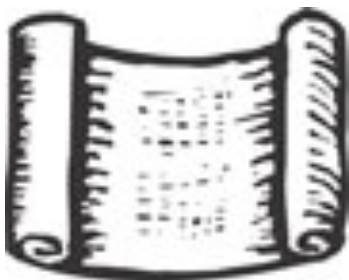
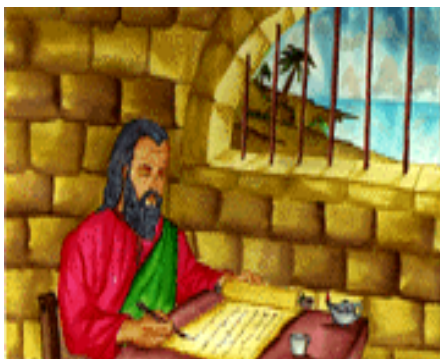
13. 2 Corinthians *for growing believers*
14. Philippians *for growing believers*
15. Philemon *for growing believers*
16. 2 Timothy *for growing believers*
17. 1 & 2 Peter *for growing believers*
18. 1, 2 & 3 John *for growing believers*
19. Hebrews *for growing believers*
20. James *for growing believers*
21. Jude *for growing believers*
22. The Old Testament *for mature believers*
23. Acts through Revelation, *verse by verse for mature believers*

PHILEMON FOR GROWING BELIEVERS

LESSON 1

A. Introduction

- This letter was written by the Apostle Paul to his friend Philemon, who lived in the city of Colosse.
- Philemon's home was the meeting place for the church in that city. It is the same church to which Paul wrote the book of Colossians.
- Both the book of Colossians and the book of Philemon were written while Paul was in a Roman prison. Paul wrote both books at the same time and sent them with Tychicus (**Colossians 4:7-9**).
- When Tychicus took these letters from Rome to Colosse, a man named Onesimus accompanied him. It was regarding this man that Paul was writing to Philemon.
- Before we can understand the letter to Philemon, we must know some things about Onesimus.
- Onesimus lived in Colosse before going to Rome, and he was a slave whose master was Philemon. Onesimus had run away from Philemon and had gone to Rome. He may have thought that no one could find him in that large city.
- But God in His love and mercy, brought him into contact with Paul and through Paul's teaching, Onesimus came to trust in Christ.



- Even though Onesimus had trusted Christ, he was still a runaway slave who had stolen money from Philemon his master.

- Onesimus knew that he must return to his master, but he did not know what Philemon would say or do; would he put him in prison, or possibly kill him?
- Paul, knowing what Philemon might do, wrote this letter requesting him to, once again, receive Onesimus as his slave, but also as a brother in Christ.
- Paul loved Onesimus so much that he asked Philemon to receive him as if he were receiving Paul himself.

B. Greetings

“Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow labourer,” Philemon 1



- In this letter to Philemon, Paul refers to himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ only; he does not mention that he was an Apostle as he often did in other letters.
- Most likely, it was because of to whom he was writing. Many times Paul was writing to those who were being deceived and did no longer believe his teaching; thus he sensed the need to remind them of his apostleship.
- However, with Philemon, Paul knew that he was writing to a man who held him in high esteem⁷.
- It is also important to notice Paul's attitude regarding his imprisonment.
- Even though he was wrongly accused and imprisoned, he was not angry and bitter, or in the throes of self-pity.
- Paul did not consider himself to be a prisoner of any man, but rather, a prisoner of God; Paul's expectations were in Him only (**Psalm 62:5**).
- We live in a fallen and sin-cursed world. If we walk in the flesh, our focus will be on our circumstances; if they are

good, we'll be happy; but if they are bad, we'll become angry and discouraged. However, if we walk in the Spirit we will be able to look beyond our circumstances to Christ.

“And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philemon 2-3

- Apphia may have been Philemon's wife and Archippus was probably his son; the church that met in his house was the Colossian church to whom Paul wrote the book of Colossians.
- As in all of Paul epistles, Paul's desire is for grace and peace to abound in the lives of his readers.



“I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother”. Philemon 4-7

- Paul writes that he thanked God for the love and faith that was being manifested through Philemon's life.
- Faith in the finished work of the cross had produced this fruit-of-the-Spirit love.
- By faith, Philemon was walking in the Spirit and therefore the fruit of the Spirit was being manifested in his life to the

extent that Paul said *“the hearts of the saints are refreshed by thee...”*

- Paul went on to say in verse 6 that *“the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.”*
- Keeping in mind what Paul wrote in **Romans 7:18**: *“In me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.”*
- As we acknowledge and depend on the finished work of the cross and all that it has given to us, and made of us in Christ, Paul said that the communication of our faith will become more effective.
- It is only as we, by faith, accept and acknowledge our co-crucifixion with Christ, that we can experience deliverance from the reign and control of our flesh and go on to walk in the Spirit.
- The more we walk in the Spirit, the more conformed to the image of Christ we will become, thereby making us more effective communicators of our faith.
- Notice again verse 7; Paul said that it gave him great joy to hear of the love that Philemon was manifesting toward others; he went on to say *the hearts of the saints in Colosse were refreshed by him.*



- The life of Christ was so manifested in him that it was like a spring of water flowing out from him and refreshing others.

C. Philemon is Asked To Manifest Love to Onesimus

“Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:” Philemon 8-10

“Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you--since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus--I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,” (NAS)

- Because of Philemon’s strong walk with the Lord and the love of Christ flowing from him to others, Paul asked him to manifest that same love toward Onesimus and accept him back because Onesimus had been born again into the family of God.
- Paul mentions that as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, he had the authority to order Philemon to accept Onesimus, but rather Paul chose to appeal to him because of his love for him.
- Paul called Onesimus *his son*, as it was Paul who had led Onesimus to the Lord.
- Before Onesimus had run away, he was not a Christian, however the Lord worked in such a way that Onesimus came in contact with Paul who was in a Roman prison and Paul apparently led him to Christ.
- Paul’s life is a great example for all of us.
- He was in prison; his main ministry was hindered, but as he walked in the Spirit, God brought others to him for the purpose of sharing hope with them.
- In a similar way He works in our lives.
- As we walk in the Spirit, God will also be faithful in leading us to hungry and prepared hearts.



“Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:” Philemon 11

- The name *Onesimus* actually means *profitable*.
- Before Onesimus came to Christ, he was an unprofitable slave who ran away.
- But after his conversion, Paul was sure that he would live up to his name and become profitable to Philemon.
- This is a wonderful example of the transformation that can take place in a person’s life after trusting in Christ.
- Before salvation, we are separated from God and at enmity with Him (**Romans 5:6, 8, 10**). We are like broken clay pots that are useless and can only be thrown away.
- However, after our conversion, we become blood-bought children of God who are totally accepted and restored to oneness with God Himself.
- We have received a new nature; the very life of Christ, and now as we by faith walk in that new life of Christ, God uses us to manifest His love and life in this fallen and sin-cursed world.
- However, if we walk in the flesh, we will continue to look and act as those worthless clay pots that are only good for the garbage pile, even though we are really children of God.

“Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.” Philemon 12-14

- Paul was in prison and unable to minister to his own needs, therefore, Onesimus had taken on the ministry of serving Paul, and had been a great help to him.
- Paul said that he would have enjoyed keeping Onesimus for the purpose of ministering to him on Philemon’s behalf, but

it would not have been right without Philemon offering him to do so.

- Paul makes very clear that he did not want to force Philemon, but rather wanted it to be done cheerfully and freely.
- It is the same in our churches today. We can put people under the law and force them to serve, give, or walk, but their actions will not be a result of the new life that is within.
- However, we can teach people to walk in the Spirit and then the good works will come as a result of the Christ-life within.

“For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?” Philemon 15-16

- In the flesh, the temptation for Philemon would have been to focus on the wrong that Onesimus had committed.
- Therefore Paul turned Philemon’s attention toward God and His purpose, and helped him to see that the running away of Onesimus was for something much bigger than a runaway slave, but rather it was for settling the eternal destiny of Onesimus.
- Paul reminded Philemon that when Onesimus returned, Philemon would be getting back more than a slave; he would be receiving a brother in Christ.

“If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.” Philemon 17-19

- It’s interesting to consider the intensity of Paul’s love for Onesimus and his desire that Philemon accept.

- Paul had grabbed the pen from whoever was transcribing for him and said, “I’m writing this myself; I will repay it!”
- God’s love is intense. As we walk in the Spirit, we will come to love others with that same intensity, gladly spending and being spent for their sake (**2 Corinthians 12:15**).
- Paul again turns Philemon’s focus to the things of God by reminding him of the fact of his own indebtedness and that, had it not been for God sending Paul to him, he would not have eternal life.
- As we reflect on our own lives before salvation, we will also gain a clearer perspective on the grace of God and what it took to make us His child, which in turn will change the way in which we view others and the wrongs that they may commit against us.

***“Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.”
Philemon 20-21***

- Paul again urges Philemon to accept and carry out his request and writes, “*But I’m confident that you will even do more than what I’ve asked.*”
- Paul apparently was confident that Philemon may consider freeing Onesimus.
- In verse 16, Paul said, “*Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved.*”
- Paul was pointing out to Philemon that his earthly relationship with Onesimus as master/servant would now be overridden by their new spiritual relationship as brothers in Christ.

D. Closing Remarks

“Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say. But withal prepare me

also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow labourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” Philemon 22-25

- Paul apparently thought that he would be released from prison at some point, and then planned on visiting Philemon and the Colossian church.
- In fact he was released from prison, though some time later he was re-arrested and put to death.
- The others that Paul mentions and requests that Philemon greet on his behalf were men who had been working together with Paul for the sake of the gospel.
- The Colossian church had sent Epaphras for the purpose of ministering to Paul.
- Mark was the one who turned back and left Paul and Barnabas on one of their journeys. The Lord must have done a great work in his life, as he was in Colosse ministering to the church there.
- Aristarchus and Demas were other men who worked together with Paul to teach and disciple believers.
- Luke was one who had accompanied Paul on many of his journeys. He is also the one who the Holy Spirit used to write the gospel of Luke.



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