

## Lesson #15 - PHILEMON AND TITUS

Before starting this lesson, read the one chapter of Philemon.

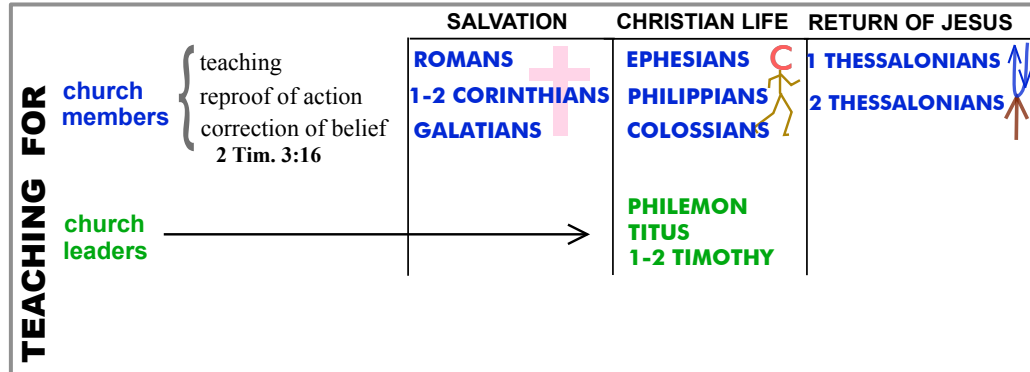
We have finished Paul's letters for **church members**.

From them, we get our historical beliefs of **SALVATION**, the **CHRISTIAN LIFE** and the **RETURN OF JESUS**.

**SALVATION** means **Jesus** is Savior; He made our payment.

The **CHRISTIAN LIFE** means **Jesus** is Head; we are members of His Body.

The **RETURN OF JESUS** means all believers will receive resurrection bodies and meet Jesus in the air to be with Him forever. Our faith is centered around Jesus.



After teaching for church members, Paul gives teaching for **church leaders**.

Their **CHRISTIAN LIFE** involves 2 aspects - how they should live and how they should lead.

There will be 4 books. The easiest way to understand and remember them is to put them in chronological order.

**PHILEMON, TITUS, 1 and 2 TIMOTHY.**

Paul was in Rome under house arrest from 58-60 AD. When the 2 years are almost up, he knows his appeal is going to be heard by the Roman supreme court. If Roman law is followed, he will be set free. Paul is looking forward to this freedom and the opportunity to revisit the churches. But some of them need teaching about the Christian life right away.

So in 60 AD, when 2 men are ready to leave Rome and go back to the churches in Asia province, Paul writes church members in Ephesus, Colosse and 2 smaller towns. He also sends a personal note to a friend in Colosse, named Philemon. This is the book we will study first.



### BACKGROUND OF PHILEMON

**Philemon** is a wealthy businessman. He had put his faith in Jesus thru the influence of Paul. We know this from verse 19. Paul writes, *you owe me your very self*, meaning his spiritual life. According to verse one, Philemon has now become a church leader. Paul calls him a fellow-worker.

Verse 2 says the church meets in his home. Paul also greets Apphia and Archippus, whom he calls a fellow-soldier, meaning he also is involved in church leadership. Apphia is Philemon's wife - Archippus is their adult son.

This is the church where Epaphras was pastor. He had gone to Rome to get answers about Gnosticism, but then because he was a church leader, he had been arrested. So now Philemon and his son are filling in as leaders. They are getting Paul's letter about Gnosticism.

Philemon is also getting a personal note about a man named **Onesimus**.

From the 25 verses, we can piece the story together. Onesimus, had been a slave in Philemon's house. One day Onesimus stole money from Philemon and ran away to Rome, hoping to lose himself in the big city. Weeks or months later someone brings him to hear Paul as he teaches while under house arrest. After listening over a period of time, Onesimus becomes a believer in Jesus.

As the weeks go by, a friendship develops. Onesimus begins to help Paul in practical ways and becomes invaluable. Paul is in his 60's; Onesimus, probably in his 20's. Because of the age difference, because of the guidance Paul gives him and because of the friendship and help of Onesimus, their relationship develops like father and son. Finally, one day Onesimus gets the courage to tell Paul about his past. He is a runaway slave from Colosse. His owner is Philemon.

How surprised and concerned he must have been when he learns Paul is a close friend of Philemon. Paul is also concerned. He has always told believers to obey the law. Roman law says Onesimus, as slave, has to be sent back to Philemon. But punishment for runaway slaves is a severe beating. When stealing is also involved, the runaway is put to death by crucifixion. By sending Onesimus back, Paul is sending him to his death. He certainly does not want to do that. Yet he cannot ignore the situation.

Because he knows Philemon and his character, Paul decides to write to him. It is very literally a covering letter - it is covering the life of Onesimus. And Onesimus is the one who will be handing it to Philemon. Can you picture the scene? When he gets back to Colosse and approaches Philemon, the first thing he would say is, *please, before you do anything to me - read this letter. It is from Paul, your close friend.*

## EXPLANATION

Philemon will read,

*... I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul - an old man - and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus - I appeal to you for my (spiritual) son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.... Formerly he was **useless** to you, but now he has become **useful** both to you and to me. 1:9, 11*

The name Onesimus means *useful*. It was a name commonly given to slaves of that day, hoping they would live up to that name. Paul says, In the past, Onesimus never lived up to his name, but now he will.

*Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while, was that you might have him back for good, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me, but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. Since you consider **me** a partner, welcome **him** as you would welcome me. 1:15-17*

Paul, very tactfully, is telling Philemon - *give your slave his freedom.*

Because Onesimus stole money from Philemon, he needs to make restitution. Altho he wants to, he has no money and no way to pay it back. He had expressed this concern to Paul. It is why Paul tells Philemon in verse 18 in the original Greek,

*Since he has wronged you and owes you something, put it on my account. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back - not to mention that you owe me your very self (your spiritual life.)*

Both in verses 17 and 18, the Greek form of the word "if" shows Paul is making statements he considers to be facts that are true. So in our English language, it should be translated with the word "since."

In verses 13-14, Paul had made an indirect request.

*I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.*

Now in verse 20, Paul hints at this again, making another play on the meaning of Onesimus' name.

*I do wish brother, that I may have some usefulness, ("some Onesimus") from you.*

## OUTLINE

Thanksgiving vss. 1-7  
Appeal vss. 8-16  
Requests vss. 17-25

Thruout the note, Paul shows utmost tact and courtesy.

In verses 1-7, he thanks God for Philemon's faith and love.

In verses 8-16, he makes his appeal for Onesimus.

Finally, in verses 17-25, he finally makes the requests.

## LESSONS

### Forgiveness

In the Christian life, when people genuinely repent and acknowledge their wrong, we extend forgiveness.

Onesimus is a believer, has repented of his action and has a genuine change in his attitude and actions. Because of this, Philemon should forgive him.

### Slavery

Paul knows slavery is a social evil. No one ever has a right to own another person.

He also knows he cannot make a change with the Roman empire.

He must start with believers. As long as believers own slaves, they have no right to tell the world what to do.

Paul's responsibility is to teach believers what **they** should do.

Philemon should no longer see Onesimus as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. He should free him and then hire him as an employee. The first job he should give him is to send him back to Rome to assist Paul.

Paul wrote hundreds of personal notes in his lifetime. But this is the only one that became part of Scripture. There are 2 reasons.

First of all, it gives a permanent example of what a slave owner should do.

If Christians had taken Paul's teaching seriously, slavery in England and in America would never have continued as it did. Tragically, the majority of slave owners in the South were believers. They should have freed their slaves, let them stay on the plantation in their housing, given them a small area of land for themselves and then hired them as employees. This book of Philemon shows what God expects His people to do.

A second reason this book became part of the Bible is because it gives a spiritual picture of us.

God created us for a relationship with Him. But in willful disobedience, we went our own way. He gave us energy and life. He gave us time, money and health. But we stole it when we used it only for ourselves – what we wanted to do. We robbed Him of praise and honor. As a result, we deserved to be forever separated from Him.

Then Jesus, as God's Son, came to this earth. He entered the human race and became one of us.

On the cross, all sin was put on Him. He was separated from the Father. He made our payment. When we accept His payment, Jesus turns to the Father and says, *where they have wronged You, whatever they owe You, put it to My account.*

God the Father then puts all our disobedience on Jesus' account. In turn all of Jesus' holiness is put on our account. God the Father forgives our sin.

Then Jesus turns to the Father again and says, *welcome him - receive her as You receive Me.* In response, God the Father now sees us in Jesus. He enjoys us as He enjoys His Son Jesus.

Paul had said regarding Onesimus, *Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever.*

We were spiritually separated from God the Father for a little while. By accepting the payment of Jesus we will be with Him forever!!!. What a beautiful picture this book of Philemon gives us.

## TITUS

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*At this point, stop and read the 3 chapters of Titus. Then continue with this lesson.*

## BACKGROUND

The book of **PHILEMON** was written from Rome in 60 AD. As Paul expected, within a few months, the supreme court of Rome reviewed his case.

During the 2 years of house arrest, none of the **Jewish leaders** had come from Jerusalem to make any accusations.

Not even the **Roman governor** in Israel had come to accuse him.

Being a Roman citizen, Roman law was applied, and Paul was set free.

Following his plans, Paul goes first to Philippi. He wants to personally thank them for their financial support over the years and for sending their pastor to help him.

Then Paul goes to Colosse to see Philemon. He wants to give the church the latest news about their pastor Epaphras who is still a prisoner in Rome.

From there, it would be logical for Paul to visit the churches in Galatia. Then on to Tarsus, his home town - Antioch, his home church - plus Jerusalem, at the Temple, where he would thank God for his freedom.



By this time, almost a year has gone by. Paul now wants to begin a new work in a difficult area. To help him, he finds the young Greek man named Titus. Like Timothy, Titus had put his faith in Jesus thru the ministry of Paul. Titus had also helped Paul on the early missionary trips. Because he was gifted with an assertive personality, he had been Paul's troubleshooter when there were problems. Now Paul wants to work with Titus again. The difficult place is the island of Crete.

The message of Jesus first came to the island with the Jews who had been in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. That was 31 AD. But over the years, the message had gotten completely distorted. So now, in 62 AD, Paul wants to bring the gospel once again to the people.

Over the next year, Paul and Titus work and teach together. Soon there are new believers and churches are started. But these people do not have a history of synagogue training or background in the Old Testament. And they have a culture that makes it hard for them to mature and develop in their spiritual life. This means they need a lot more training and experience before any of them are qualified to be church leaders.

But Paul wants to get back to the church in Ephesus to follow up on the letter he sent 2 years earlier. He also wants to revisit the churches in Macedonia. So he heads north, leaving Titus to finish up the things that need to be done.



Some 15 months go by. Paul is working in Macedonia - in northern Greece. Believers in Crete now have more knowledge and spiritual maturity. So Paul writes to encourage Titus and to give him the requirements for church leaders. Soon he will send a replacement, so Titus can leave and join him in western Greece - in Nicopolis.

Titus needs to keep emphasizing **CORRECT BELIEF**

Seven times Paul mentions the word doctrine or teaching. 1:9; 1:9; 1:11; 2:1; 2:3; 2:7; 2:10

As in other places, there are false teachers who have influenced many families. The new church leaders need to know what they believe and why. After Titus leaves, these leaders have to not only preserve the message of Jesus but also refute false teaching. So correct belief is essential both for church leaders and church members.

But that is not enough. There must also be **CORRECT LIVING**.

It is not just what they **talk** about in church, but how they **live** in the world.

Thru the centuries, the people of Crete had been notorious for their style of living.

Paul mentions their reputation.

*Even one of their own prophets has said, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.* 1:12

This had been written in 600 BC by a poet living on the island - a famous man named **Epimenides**.

Some 400 years later, in 175 BC, the Greek historian **Polybius** said...

The people of Crete *were the only ones in whose estimate no profit is disgraceful*.

Thru the years their reputation continued, so in 75 BC., **Cicero** - a Roman orator and philosopher commented,

*Only the people of Crete consider highway robbery an honorable profession.*

The people of Crete were so associated with dishonesty, greed, gluttony and laziness that their name created a new verb in the Greek language. To **cretize** became a Greek verb meaning to *cheat, lie or deceive*.

This means new believers on the island of Crete have a background and culture that will be difficult to overcome. It is why they need to focus on correct living.

Seven times Paul talks about **doing good**. 1:16; 1:16; 2:7; 2:14; 3:1; 3:8; 3:14

Five times he talks about **self-control** - the ability to control their desires and impulses.

## OUTLINE

Organizing the **church** 1  
Teaching the **people** 2-3

Instruction for a Christian leader

It is written in 63 AD from northern Greece.

Because of Paul's background and experience, he was very aware of the differences in cultures and thinking. Thruout this letter, he shows the contrast between the culture of Crete and the Gospel message.

Paul begins with a summary statement of his ministry to the believers in Crete. His **goal** and **purpose** is...

To stimulate their faith

To develop their practical knowledge of truth because that is what leads to godly living

But godly living will never come naturally nor be easy for these believers. To motivate them, he reminds them of God's assurance – they will spend eternity with Him.

However, these people have had generations of lies and deceit. They live with skepticism and mistrust of anything people say or promise. So he includes 2 facts about God that shows He is different. God does not lie. Before God ever created humanity, He predestined that when humans did put their faith in Jesus, He guaranteed they would have eternal life with Him. He made that promise at the beginning of time and He has never changed it. It is this promise of eternal life with God in the future that should motive them to godly living in this life

*Paul, ...an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness – in the **certainty** of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time...1:1-2*

Most Bibles use the word "hope," but both in Hebrew and Greek, when used as a noun, the word "hope" always means certainty.

**HOPE** (noun)

Today's English - **wish, uncertainty**

Original English - **trust, certainty**

Greek - **absolute certainty**

ἐλπίς, elpis

## CHURCH LEADERS

According to verse 5, Paul left Titus in Crete to finish what still needed to be done.

So in these last months, Titus has been instructing believers, organizing churches and stopping false teachers.

Now, after teaching **all** the believers, he needs to appoint church leaders in every town.

### HIS TITLE 1:5-7

Paul uses two Greek words for a church leader.

In verses 5 and 6 he uses the word *presbúteros*. It means **elder**.

In verse 7 he uses the Greek word *epískopos*, meaning **overseer**.

Paul is not talking about 2 different positions but rather two different titles to define them.

The word *elder* says the leader should have maturity and developed character.

The word *overseer* shows the responsibility that he has.

In our day, these words have changed their meaning and are talking about two different positions in a church.

There are elders and there are pastors, or they may be called pastors and bishops.

But in the books of Titus and Timothy, the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century used both words for the same position – the elder **was** the pastor of the church.

Titus will help the congregation of each church to choose one of their own to be their spiritual leader.

### The church leader

**Presbuteros** **elder** ..... **his character - mature**  
**Episkopos** **overseer** .. **his responsibility**

## HIS QUALIFICATIONS 1:6-9

He is to be blameless in 3 areas. This does not mean he has to be perfect. It means no credible accusation can be made against him in regard to these things.

### NO ACCUSATION ABOUT HIS HOME LIFE 1:6

*An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.*

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, churches met in private homes. Leaders were chosen from the local congregation. From the time of Paul until around the 3-400s, church leaders were usually married. These qualifications say he and his family must all be believers.

Among the Jews in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century,  
divorce, polygamy and marriage infidelity were common.

Among the Gentiles in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century, there were many forms of immorality.

While there were divorce laws, they had become lax. When a man got tired of his wife, he would not bother with any divorce. He would separate and then go out and legally marry another woman. If he tired of her, another separation and another legal marriage. In addition, a man might be married, but then engage in prostitution, have a mistress or have various affairs.

Rather than try to deal with each possibility, Paul makes a general requirement. A church leader must be a man of one woman. That is the literal Greek. It means he must follow God's rules - married to only one woman at a time with no sexual activity outside of marriage. And using God's definition of marriage - only between a man and a woman.

Both in Paul's day and ours, a man may have had immorality in his past. If he admitted it was wrong, repented, and has lived an extended time in holiness - he has proven himself and is qualified to be a church leader. Many churches today think this verse is talking about divorce and remarriage, but in Paul's day, divorce was not that common. He was dealing much more with the issues of polygamy and immorality outside of marriage.

Paul also says a leader's children should have a love for God and be under control. This applies to minors who are living with their parents or any family members living in the home. Remember, the church met in that home, so family members need to be under control. The purpose of this qualification is to show the man had leadership abilities. If he cannot effectively lead at home, he will not be able to effectively lead a church congregation or have their respect.

### NO ACCUSATION ABOUT HIS PERSONAL LIFE 1:7-8

*Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless - without accusation in the following - not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.*

Notice church leaders on this island cannot continue in their culture of dishonesty.

Verse 7 describes the things they should **not** do. Verse 8 now says what they should do.

*Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.*

### NO ACCUSATION ABOUT HIS TEACHING 1:9

*He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught.* He must know what he believes and why.

## HIS RESPONSIBILITIES 1:6-9; 3:1-2

1. Encourage and motivate believers thru right teaching
2. Refute the false teachers, showing why they are wrong

False teachers on the island have influenced entire families. Paul says about them...

*They claim to know God, but by their actions, they deny him.* 1:16

Teachers can say they are believers and they can talk about God. But if they continue in violation of God's commands, they show they are not connected to God.



### 3. Correct believers in their wrong actions

People in Crete were known for their continual rebellion against Rome. So Titus is to teach believers they should be different in this area as well.

*Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate and to show true humility toward all men. 3:1-2*

The life of Titus shows he follows God. He **is** qualified to teach others. He is to be the ultimate example of what is expected of all church leaders.

### WHAT HE IS TO TEACH

*You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. 2:1* The word “sound” means teaching that brings wholeness, completeness and health to their spiritual lives. At the end of the chapter, Paul defines and explains what **SOUND DOCTRINE** includes.

#### **There must be teaching to believe correctly.**

*The grace of God that brings **salvation** has appeared to all people. 2:11*

God the Father gave us salvation thru Jesus. In His first coming, He appeared in Bethlehem; He lived, died and then rose again. Teaching begins with belief - salvation thru faith in Jesus. But teaching to believe correctly is not enough.

#### **There must be teaching to live correctly.**

*It - our salvation - teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to **live** self-controlled, upright and **godly lives** in this present age. 2:12*

The Holy Spirit gives us power to say “no” to what the world offers and “yes”...  
To self-control  
To uprightness - our relationship with others  
To godliness - our relationship with God

#### **There must be teaching to motivate and encourage. 2:13**

*...We wait for the blessed certainty - the **glorious appearing** of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

We have certainty that Jesus will return and we will live with Him forever. This is motivation to be faithful in obedience. It is encouragement in times of trials and suffering.

Notice that sound doctrine involves the 3 topics that Paul taught in his letters to church members...

**Salvation, the Christian life, the return of Jesus.**

### WHOM HE IS TO TEACH

#### **Older men and older women**

**Older women are then to teach younger women.** There are several reasons for this.

Some of the older women are widows without any family to provide for them. In the first century, there is no way for widows to provide for themselves. This means widows could literally starve to death. So over the years, Paul developed a plan.

Older widows who do not remarry, can take vows and pledge themselves to their local church. They are given responsibilities and in return, the church provides their food, housing and clothing. One of their responsibilities is a teaching ministry in their church that met in a home. Paul says older women must be taught the same as older men so all of them can effectively teach.

Having older women teach younger women will also prevent any problem or accusation against Titus. He is young as well as single. Husbands could get jealous and make accusations against him. To avoid these problems, Titus is to teach older women and **they** are to teach younger women.

One of the things they should teach younger women is to be *subject* to their husbands. 2:5

This does not mean teaching them to be door-mats or allow themselves to be abused.

It means showing them how to work with and not against their spouse; to respond to their husband so they can work as a team and not always be in competition with each other. Obviously, if she or her children are being abused, the older women would show her how to get out of the situation and find protection.

## WHOM HE IS TO TEACH continued

### Younger men

#### Slaves 1:9-10

One of the things slaves need to be taught is not to steal from their masters.

Since people of Crete were known for their dishonesty, it is not surprising that stealing was a problem, even among new believers.

## WHY SOUND TEACHING IS IMPORTANT

### ***So that no one will malign the Word of God. 2:5***

This is said in relation to the young women. If younger women claim to follow Scripture and live impure lives or continually put their husbands down, people will think God does not care, and it is part of the Christian faith. The Word of God would be discredited.

### ***So that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. 2:8***

This is referring to Titus. In his teaching, he needs to be careful with his attitude and words so critics of the gospel message will be silenced.

*In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. 2:7-8*

### ***So that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. 2:9***

This is talking about slaves

*Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted,*

Masters would pay little attention, hearing their slaves talk about Jesus. But if they see their slaves honest and trustworthy, putting in a good day's work, they would want to know about a belief with that much power to change lives. It would make the gospel message attractive.

### **3 reasons why church leaders need to teach sound doctrine**

So no one will discredit the word of God

So critics will be silenced

So the teaching about God is attractive

The people in Crete have a culture of deceit and dishonesty that goes back hundreds of years. How could they possibly change?

Paul gives the key in 3:5

*He, God, saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,*

We were born connected to a sin nature empowered by Satan that automatically makes us rebellious. When we accept the payment of Jesus, God the Father disconnects us from that sin nature and connects us to the new nature that is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

This is why Paul can say,

*And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. 3:8 ... Our people - believers - must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives 3:14*

By nature and culture, the people of Crete do not like to work; they are dishonest, deceitful and lazy. It is in their genes. They have 10 generations of living like this. But thru the power of the Holy Spirit, believers in Crete **can** be different.

This is true for our lives as well. **No one ever** needs to be a prisoner of their **past**. All the baggage passed down thru our families no longer needs to continue. We have the Holy Spirit living within us. Thru His power and help from others, like the believers in Crete, **we** can be set free. Our lives **can** change. This is good news. It is part of the gospel.