

Philemon 1:22-25

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Paul concludes his letter to Philemon asking him to prepare a place for him to stay whenever he is able to come and sends him greetings from some believers who are serving with Paul who knew Philemon. Paul finishes his letter with a blessing.

Paul completed his letter with one additional request, a few greetings from some brothers in Christ who personally knew Philemon, and a final blessing.

The request was for Philemon to *prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.* This indicates that Paul was likely nearing the end of his imprisonment in Rome under house arrest. And Paul knew he would soon be released. Paul attributed this to God answering Philemon's *prayers*. Indeed, countless Gentile believers were likely praying for this very thing.

Even as he was active in Rome, Paul was busy making plans for how he could further advance the gospel. And among his post-imprisonment plans was to personally come to Colossae and thank Philemon for his great service. Paul hoped to stay at Philemon's house when he visited Colossae. It seems reasonable to presume that Paul mentions this to remind Philemon that whatever decision he made would be made with full transparency. It is a spiritual reality that all decisions will be brought fully into light (Hebrews 4:13).

Paul concluded his epistle by mentioning five brothers *in Christ* who also sent their greetings to Philemon. The men were *Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke*. These five men were with Paul in Rome at the time that he wrote this letter. It is likely that all of them and Philemon personally knew one another. At the very least Philemon knew of them.

The first man Paul named was *Epaphras*. Epaphras was a believer from Colossae. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he is mentioned twice:

“We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.”
(Colossian 1:3-8)

“Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who

are in Laodicea and Hierapolis”
(Colossian 4:12-13)

From these two passages we learn that *Epaphras* was the one who brought the gospel to Colossae (Colossians 1:7). Because Paul indicated that he had never been to Colossae (he had “heard of their faith”—Colossians 1:4); it is believed that *Epaphras* learned the Gospel from Paul during the apostle’s two year stay in nearby Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Acts 19:10).

In his letter to the Colossian church (written and delivered at the same time as this one) Paul described *Epaphras* as “our fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of *Christ*” (Colossians 1:7) and as “one of your number, a bonds slave of *Jesus Christ*” (Colossians 4:12). In Philemon, Paul described *Epaphras* as *my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus*. These descriptions suggest that *Epaphras* was imprisoned in Rome alongside Paul on separate charges for the sake of *Jesus* and His gospel.

It was through *Epaphras* that Paul had learned so much about the church in Colossae (Colossians 1:7). While in Rome, *Epaphras* fervently prayed for Colossae, and the nearby towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis, that they would stand complete and fully assured of God’s will in the trials they faced (Colossians 4:12-13).

Epaphras is not mentioned anywhere else in scripture.

After writing *Epaphras greets you*, Paul mentioned four other men who did *as well*. All four are described as *my fellow workers*. All four are likewise mentioned in Paul’s letter to the Colossians (Colossians 4:10; 4:14).

Mark is the next man Paul references. *Mark* was the author of the gospel bearing his name. He was a follower of *Jesus*, and a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). He later became a coworker with Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 12:25-13:13). *Mark* left about part-way through, to the frustration of Paul (Acts 13:13). This frustration caused a bitter dispute between Paul and Barnabas over whether or not *Mark* should join them on their second journey (Acts 16:36-40). But apparently *Mark* came back into favor with Paul; perhaps this took place when *Mark* came to visit and serve him during his imprisonment in Rome.

Mark is mentioned in Colossians where Paul promises to send the believers instructions for how they are to receive him if he comes (Colossians 4:10). At the end of his life Paul requested Timothy to bring *Mark* to him, because “he is useful to me for service” (2 Timothy 4:11).

Aristarchus was the third man who *greeted* Philemon at the end of this letter. He is described in Paul’s letter to the Colossians as *my fellow prisoner* (Colossians 4:10). *Aristarchus* was a Macedonian believer from Thessalonica (Acts 27:2). He was with Paul when the followers of Artemis stirred up a riot against Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). He journeyed with Paul on his ill-fated voyage to Rome and apparently remained with him in prison. This likely explains why Paul described *Aristarchus* in his letter to the Colossians as *my fellow prisoner* (Colossians 4:10).

Aristarchus is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

Demas was the fourth man who *greeted* Philemon at the end of this letter. He too was mentioned in Colossians 4:14. He too was described as one of Paul's *fellow workers*. *Demas* was with Paul and a fellow worker during his first imprisonment in Rome. But unfortunately, later on *Demas* seemed to have abandoned Paul during his time of need as the apostle awaited execution under Nero. Paul wrote of *Demas*'s departure to Timothy in particularly harsh terms:

“for *Demas*, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.”(2 Timothy 4:10)

Paul's harsh comments about *Demas* suggest that his desertion was out of cowardice. His desertion does not mean that he was not a believer in *Jesus* or a member of God's eternal family. On the contrary, his faithful service for a time indicated that he did believe *Jesus* and receive the gift of eternal life. The **gift** of eternal life is eternally given for believing in *Jesus* alone (John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9). The gift of eternal life has nothing to do with our works. On the other hand, the **prize** of eternal life, our reward or inheritance, is dependent upon how well we walk by faith in this life. Speaking of the prize of eternal life, Paul wrote to Timothy, “If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us” reigning with Him (2 Timothy 2:10). Apparently, *Demas* did not endure. If true, he would have lost his eternal reward for shirking the gospel when he abandoned Paul. But *Demas* had not been faithless at the time Paul wrote this letter to Philemon.

The last and final of the *fellow workers* Paul mentions is *Luke*. *Luke* was the author of both the Gospel of *Luke* and of Acts, which is the Bible's historical record of the Apostolic church. *Luke* joined Paul at Troas on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16:8-10). It is at this point that his narrative of Acts shifts from third person to first person. *Luke* was an eyewitness for many of the later events of that book. In Colossians, *Luke* is grouped with Epaphras and *Demas* and not with *Aristarchus*, *Mark*, and Justus who were identified as kingdom *workers* “who are from the circumcision” (Colossians 4:11). The phrase “from the circumcision” means those who were Jews. This suggests that *Luke* was not a Jew, but a Gentile. If true, he is the only named Gentile who wrote a book of the New Testament.

Paul ends his short epistle to Philemon with a final blessing. *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit*. His blessing is a prayer for *Christ's grace* to be with Philemon's *spirit*. We always need God's *grace* (John 15:5). If Philemon is like most of us, he would especially need God's *grace* to exercise grace himself, and forgive and release Onesimus with his blessing. Philemon was being asked to do something very difficult. But this is the pattern of the Bible; God asks hard things of those who are faithful to Him. God asked hard things of Abraham, the father of those who are of faith, asking Abraham to leave his home and family to go to a place he had not seen (Romans 4:11-12, Genesis 12:1-3). Abraham is one of many Old Testament saints held up as examples of faith for us to emulate (Hebrews 11). The Bible makes clear that God asks those who believe in Him to do hard things in order to reward them greatly. The Apostle Paul spoke of this often, here in his letter to the church at Corinth saying the rewards God has for those who follow Him faithfully through difficulty are beyond anything we can even comprehend:

“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND *WHICH* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”
(1 Corinthians 2:9)

In making this statement, Paul quotes the Old Testament (Isaiah 64:4, 65:17) which makes it clear that this has always been God’s approach to humanity.

Paul’s request of Philemon to exercise such great forgiveness can stand as an admonition for us to live a life of forgiveness. ([See commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, where forgiving others is the centerpiece of Jesus’s teaching](#)).

Biblical Text

22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.