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A Dilemma Only God Can Solve

Tuesday February 7th Annual LEGISLATIVE OPENING PRAYER SERVICE

NC Museum of History, Daniels Auditorium *
**Endorsed by Lt Gov. Dan Forrest and the
Legislative Prayer Caucus**

- **PRAYER SERVICE 7:30- 8:30 AM**
- **BREAKFAST SERVED IN 1000 COURT AFTER SERVICE**
**NC MUSEUM OF HISTORY DOES NOT SUPPORT OR ENDORSE
- **SPONSORED BY CAPITOL COMMISSION**

Capitol Commission Bible Studies are held every week, Legislator Only Bible studies on Tuesdays. Staff Bible studies on Mondays. **Monday Staff Bible study:** (1) a woman's study at noon in LOB 409 this is led by Jean Yost; (2) a staff men's Bible study at noon in the Chapel; led by Brad Harbaugh. Tuesdays Legislator's only Bible study from 7:30am-8:20am in LOB 414 (*light breakfast provided*). These *weekly* expositional Bible studies are non-partisan.

I pray that these Bible studies will be edifying to you. My sole intent is to serve you, and to be a resource to you for pastoral care, counsel, and prayer. **Please accept my study in the Word of God, as evidence of my desire to serve you.**

– Rev. Brad Harbaugh, North Carolina State Minister

Introduction: Philemon transports the reader to 62 AD. This personal letter from the Apostle Paul to a slave master reveals how the good news of Jesus Christ brings about life change. It sets captives free.

“Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother to Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church that meets in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philemon 1:1-3.

Philemon Background

Author, Time and Situation of Writing

Paul and Timothy are mentioned as authors but notice “I” is used in verse 4 and forward. Paul is the primary author, but he may have dictated this letter to Timothy.

The time is AD 62. The Apostle Paul was under house arrest in Rome. The Book of Acts chapters 26-27 presents the account of how Paul a missionary came to be prisoner in Rome. The Lord had orchestrated Paul to be under house arrest in Rome. Notice the very first statement of this letter; “Paul a prisoner for Christ Jesus.”

Why would Paul say that?

Under house arrest, God the Spirit spoke through Paul to write many letters to address church issues, present sound teaching and give caution to false teaching. Paul also wrote to two pastors, Titus and Timothy and Philemon a church member of Colosse. The church of Colosse has met in his home.

These letters of Paul are more than correspondence. God spoke specifically through Paul, (I Peter 1:21) and God clearly directed the specific writings of Paul to be part of the canon of scripture.

God used this setting of house arrest to carry out God's purpose and plan of writing many New Testament books.

God often allows situations we would never plan to be in our life. Paul's situation here illustrates how God can use these situations for His good.

What gave Paul the power to accomplish so much from this setting?

Paul shares in his writings key resources that helped him handle hard life situations and be productive in them. Here are a few:

- It was Christ in him that gave him strength, (Philippians 4:13).
- It was knowing Christ personally and the power of His resurrection that equipped Paul for what God allowed, (Philippians 3:1-10).
- It was a daily decision to die to self and allow Christ to live in him that gave Paul power for living, (Galatians 2:20; Romans 12:1-2).

Capitol Commission Bible Studies

Tuesday Legislator's Only (14th of February) @ 7:30am – 8:00am, LOB 414

Monday Women's Only (6th of February) @ 12:00pm – 1:00pm, LOB 409

Monday Men's Only (6th of February) @ 12 Noon – 12:45pm, Chapel



Enhancing Trust

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- It was a perspective of purpose and calling in His life along with God's sovereignty that gave Paul peace, (Ephesians 2:10).
- Finally, Paul learned the power of thankfulness in all circumstances, (I Thessalonians 5:17) (Galatians 2:20)

Paul was an overcomer in the worst of circumstances because he knew his identity and his purpose. He came to know both of these after he met the risen and ascended Christ on the Damascus Road, (Acts 9). That encounter with God the Son put the world in perspective. Paul stated to those in Rome:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, Romans 1:16,17a.

Paul was so eager to share that God had provided a way to be at peace with Him, (Romans 5:1). Furthermore, Paul sought to present the risen Christ as the True Shepherd of each person's soul, (I Peter 2:25). Paul, was brought up a Pharisee in extremely religious instruction. He strove to be righteous and faithful and zealous to God. While deceived by his religious pursuit Paul literally saw the light on the Damascus road. There he realized that salvation is a decision of faith, putting your trust in what Christ has done. Paul proclaimed that every person can be reconciled to God. Throughout the New Testament the gospel is presented as a gift from God through Jesus Christ to receive, (Romans 6:23). In writing to Ephesus Paul made it very clear that receiving the gift was a decision of faith, putting your trust in Christ and understanding you are powerless to save yourself, (Ephesians 2:1-9).

Paul's missionary journeys took him from Capital to Capital. Today those areas represent parts of Turkey, Athens and Italy. His mission was the gospel.

The book of Philemon presents how the gospel changed lives.

Philemon, was a slave master. Apphia, more than likely, is Philemon's wife. Paul had spent time in Colosse and during that time led Philemon to Christ.

The situation for writing is that Onesimus is a runaway slave of Philemon. Somehow, he has crossed paths with Paul in Rome and Paul has led him to also believe in Christ.

Slavery in any form is terrible and wrong. In the Roman Empire it is estimated that there were 60 million slaves at this time. Slavery was common. Slaves were property according to Roman law. A slave master had the right to execute his runaway slave.

The details are not clear, but this letter presents clues that Onesimus had robbed his master and fled. It could be speculated that he fled to Rome to be lost in the crowd. But God directed Onesimus to Paul.

Paul, under house arrest was allowed visitors. Onesimus met with him. Paul shared the same gospel to Onesimus that he had with Philemon. Onesimus put his trust in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. He grew in his faith. At a point in time, it became clear to Paul that Onesimus needed to go back to Philemon. What a situation!

This is the situation of writing. Paul, Onesimus and Philemon are the main characters.

Put yourself in Paul's shoes, what thoughts do you believe went through his mind sending Onesimus back?

Put yourself in Onesimus shoes walking back with this letter? What would you struggle with?

This letter presents a realistic picture of the power of the gospel to change lives. At the same time, we see a beautiful picture of what the Father has done for us in Jesus Christ. **Martin Luther said, "All of us are Onesimuses!" and he was right.**¹

Thank you for allowing Capitol Commission the nobility to provide Bible studies to you. If you have any questions, please talk with us, or contact by email or phone.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 270). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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NEXT CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES:
Tuesday, 14th of February @ 7:30am in LOB 414;
also @ 12:00pm in LOB 409 for women;
and again @ 12 NOON for staff men in the Chapel.