Epistle to Philemon Verses 1 – 7 – Introduction and Thanksgiving:-

The Occasion and Theme:-
Paul wrote this letter on behalf of Philemon's slave called Onesimus. After escaping from his master he had been converted under Paul's ministry. The church recognised this letter, not only as the private correspondence of Paul himself but also as containing apostolic teaching to be received as scripture. Note that "The Church"is included in the opening address.
The Master / Slave relationship posed a problem for the whole of the church, not just for Philemon personally. He was not the only slaveholder in the Colossian church – see Colossians chapter 4, verse 1. The relationship between servants / slaves and masters was also expressed in Ephesians chapter 6, verses 5 – 9 and 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 18 – 25.
By going back, the slave, who after absconding had become a Christian, was acting as a servant to Paul. The Apostle not only gives instructions concerning the principles governing the relationships of Christian brothers but reminds us that these principles are to be realised not *"by compulsion, but by your own free will"* Philemon verse 14.
Note that Onesimus, along with Tychicus was the bearer of Paul's Letter to the Colossians – Colossians chapter 4, verses 7 – 9. Onesimus would need the personal letter from Paul if he was returning home after absconding as a slave!

Verses 1 – 3; Introduction:-
Instead of his more usual term as "apostle" here Paul designates himself as *"a prisoner for Christ Jesus"*. See Colossians chapter 4, verse 18. The addressee was not only this Christian family but to *"the church in your house"*. For smaller groups of believers it was customary to gather in the home of one of the members rather than 'rent' a larger building or hall.

V**erses 4 – 7; Thanksgiving:-**
In Paul's prayers the mention of Philemon always brought to the apostle's mind a word of thanksgiving. Philemon was characterised by 'love' and 'faith'. These attitudes were directed primarily towards Christ but found their outworking in the church.
The ongoing prayer of Paul is that in sharing his faith, Philemon may encourage others to know and understand all the good things that are ours in the Lord Jesus Christ. Philemon's pastoral heart and his care for others has given Paul much joy and encouragement.
In writing this the apostle hopes that the love and concern shown to others will influence the attitude of Philemon to his runaway slave.

Remember that the Letter to the Colossians was sent with the same two disciples. It is worth reading Colossians chapter 4, verses 7 – 18 which gives some of the background to the short letter to Philemon.

1. Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.

2. Before our Father's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.

3. We share our mutual woes,
our mutual burdens bear,
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.

4. When we are called to part,
it gives us inward pain;
but we shall still be joined in heart,
and hope to meet again.

5. This glorious hope revives
our courage by the way;
while each in expectation lives
and waits to see the day.

6. From sorrow, toil, and pain,
and sin, we shall be free;
and perfect love and friendship reign
through all eternity.

John Fawcett 1782

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