



**OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF
PHILEMON**

Author, Date, Place of Writing

- Paul wrote this short letter probably at the same time as Colossians (A.D. 60 or 61) and sent it to Colosse with the same travelers, **Onesimus and Tychicus**.
- He apparently wrote both letters from prison in Rome, though possibly from Ephesus.

- **Prior:**

The letter to the Colossians was sent through Tychicus, accompanied by Onesimus. They also had with them letters for the Church in Ephesus (Ephesians) and Philemon. (Col 4:7; Phil 1:10-12).

Who is Philemon?

- For more than two years during his third missionary journey, Paul ministered in Asia Minor among the people of Ephesus.
- This was a successful period for the apostle to the Gentiles, who saw many converts among both residents of Ephesus and visitors to the city.
- One of the visitors converted under Paul's teaching was a man named **Philemon**, a slaveowner from the nearby city of Colossae (Philemon 1:19).

Where are we?

- A slave named Onesimus had escaped from his owner, Philemon, and had run away from Colossae to Rome in the hope that he could disappear into that populous, urban environment.
- Once in Rome, Onesimus, either by accident or by his own design, met Paul, who promptly led the runaway slave to faith in Jesus Christ.
- Paul had already been planning to send a letter to the Colossian church by the hand of Tychicus. So, in AD 60 or 61 from a prison cell in Rome, Paul wrote a personal letter to Philemon and sent Onesimus the slave back to Colossae.

Recipient, Background, and Purpose

- Paul wrote this letter to Philemon, a believer in Colossae who, along with others, was a slave owner.

Colossians 4:1 (NIV)

¹ Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Ephesians 6:5 (NIV)

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

Recipient, Background, and Purpose

- One of his slaves, Onesimus, had apparently stolen from him (see [v. 18](#)) and then run away, which under Roman law was punishable by death.
- But Onesimus met Paul and through his ministry became a Christian (see [v. 10](#)).
- Now he was willing to return to his master, and Paul writes this personal appeal to ask that he be accepted as a Christian brother (see [v. 16](#)).

Approach and Structure

- To win Philemon's willing acceptance of Onesimus, Paul writes very tactfully and in a lighthearted tone, which he creates with a wordplay (see note on [v. 11](#)).
- The appeal ([vv. 4–21](#)) is organized in a way prescribed by ancient Greek and Roman teachers:
 - to build rapport ([vv. 4–10](#)); to persuade the mind ([vv.11–19](#)); to move the emotions ([vv. 20–21](#)).
- The name Onesimus is not mentioned until the rapport has been built ([v. 10](#)), and the appeal itself is stated only near the end of the section to persuade the mind ([v. 17](#)).

General Lessons From This Book

- Live long enough, and you will understand the difficulty of offering forgiveness when you have been wronged. It does not come easy, yet as believers, we have to recognize that our ability and willingness to offer it are the result of Christ's saving work on the cross.
- Because of that fact, forgiveness serves as a determining factor in who we say we are and how we hope to live our lives. When we do not forgive, bitterness takes root in our hearts and chokes the vitality out of us.
- In what ways has forgiveness been a struggle for you since you accepted Christ's forgiveness? Allow Paul's letter to Philemon to encourage forgiveness in your own life, and trust God to foster renewed life in your heart and your relationships.

Outline

- Greetings (1–3)
- Thanksgiving and Prayer (4–7)
- Paul's Plea for Onesimus (8–21)
- Final Request, Greetings and Benediction (22–25)

JOURNEYS OF FORGIVENESS



PRACTICE OF FORGIVENESS

LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF PHILEMON

Meaning of names in the Book of Philemon

- 1) Philemon means “affectionate”.
- 2) Onesimus means “profitable”; “useful”; “beneficial”.
- 3) Apphia means “increasing”.
- 4) Archippus means “a master of horses”.
- 5) Paul means “small”; “humble”.
- 6) Timothy means “honoring God”.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

1) Team-work

Mentor and mentee working together for a common good. Bringing about reconciliation and the practice of forgiveness and acceptance.

Philemon 1:1 (NIV)

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

2) Forgiveness and Trust

-Forgiveness does not always mean trust.

-However, it is possible to forgive and trust. As seen in the life and case of Philemon and Onesimus.

-Paul's goal was not just to have Philemon forgive Onesimus, however, also to accept him back, not as a slave but as someone useful.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

2) Forgiveness and Trust.

Philemon 1:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose*, that you might receive him forever,

¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

3) Accountability (to the great commission, even while in chains).

Philemon 1:10 (NIV)

“that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.”

Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

4) Prayerful

Prayer was habitual for Paul. The principle of “when you pray” is also recorded in Matthew 6:5-7 (NIV)

Philemon 1:4 (NLT)

I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, - *Emphasis mine*

Prayer prompt – vs 5

Prayer request – vs 6

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

5) Praise and Rejoice with one another

Paul acknowledged the following about Philemon.

(a) Philemon's faith in the Lord Jesus (vs 5).

(b) Philemon's love for all God's people (vs 5).

(c) Philemon was someone who loved others because Paul acknowledged that Philemon's love has given him much joy and comfort. And Philemon's kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people (vs 7).

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

5) Praise and Rejoice with one another

Philemon 1:4-5, 7 (NIV)

⁴ I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,

⁵ hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints

⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

6) Reconciliation

Paul's Plea for Onesimus – Philemon 1:8-12 (NIV)

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (NIV)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and *gave us the ministry of reconciliation*: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. *And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation*. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Emphasis mine.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

7) Considerate

Paul's Plea for Onesimus - Philemon 1:8-9

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.
Emphasis mine

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

7) Considerate

Paul's Plea for Onesimus – Philemon 1:8-9

Paul did not allow his position as an apostle to have a negative influence on how he treated others. Rather, fully conscious of his place, position and influence, he was very considerate on how he treated people. He allowed himself to be guided by love - *yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love (vs 9a).*

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

7) Considerate

Philippians 2:3-5 (NIV)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

8) Encourager – Profitable vs unprofitable

Paul encourages Philemon to see pass the past. To see Onesimus no longer as someone useless (unprofitable), but useful (profitable).

Philemon 1: 11 (NIV)

Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become *useful* both to you and to me. *Emphasis Mine*

Philemon 1:15-17 (NIV)

Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— 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 fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. *Emphasis Mine*

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

9) Practice of Forgiveness

We are not told about Philemon's response to Paul, however, we can arrive at a reasoning that Paul's goal was to have Philemon forgive Onesimus for running away.

Matthew 6:12 (NIV) – Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

9) Practice of Forgiveness

It is easier to forgive when you have Christ in you because you understand the significance of forgiveness.

You understand the price He paid for your reconciliation with the Father.

You will be a better person if you live a lifestyle of forgiveness versus resentment, bitterness, grudges, etc.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

9) Practice of Forgiveness

In order to fully benefit from each other as brother's keepers, learn to forgive and encourage the people around you to purposefully live a lifestyle of forgiveness.

We forgive because we have been forgiven. When the Father forgives us of our sins, we are empowered to do likewise- knowing that we are emulating Him in the process.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

10) Like minded companionship

- Paul refers to Philemon as ...my good friend and companion in this work (Philemon 1:1a MSG).

When we refer to like-minded companionship, we simply mean keeping company with someone who has similar goals and interests as you.

-This is obvious in Paul's statement... my good friend and companion in this work (Philemon 1:1a MSG). By implication, they were together for a reason – they worked together and in this case for kingdom purposes.

-One of Paul's responsibilities was to plant churches and one of the churches planted was in Philemon's house (...and to the church in your house (Philemon 1:2b (NKJV))).

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

11) Trustworthy

A trustworthy person is a reliable person. It is commonly said that trust is built or developed over time.

Trust is earned through a series of exchanges and occurrences of character traits exhibited by a person.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

11) Trustworthy

When we trust God, we are simply saying that in the absence of any trace of Him, when the occurrences around us do not seem to reflect Him, we can depend and trust in His never changing character overtime. Amen!

Philemon 1:21 (NKJV)

Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

12) Know your place

Something very outstanding is revealed to us in this epistle that should not go unnoticed. We are taught to be knowledgeable about our place in the lives of the people we associate with.

Paul related with several people in this Epistle and I want us to see the progression and differences of the relationships.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

12) Know your place

- When Paul related with Timothy, he referred to him as my brother/our brother (**Philemon 1:1b**)
- When Paul related with Philemon, he referred to him as a good friend and companion (fellow laborer/worker, co-worker) (**Philemon 1:1c**)
- When Paul related with Onesimus, he referred to him as his spiritual child (**Philemon 1:10a**)

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

13) Back to Basics

...and to the church in your house (Philemon 1:2 NKJV)

We are reminded once again that house church is not unusual. That is how it all started. And we must not forget that “we are church.” Not the building.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

14) Relationship is currency

Relationship is indeed currency. If we obtain everything in life through money, then we are truly not living abundant life.

Beyond what money can buy, let's build relationships to a place where we can gain anything in life without necessarily spending a dime every time.

Read verse 18 and 19

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

15) Spiritual Indebtedness

- The book of Philemon shows how spiritually indebted we are to Christ.
 - Paul did for Philemon and Onesimus what Jesus Christ has done for us.
 - At this point Philemon was spiritually indebted to the Apostle Paul.
- Onesimus' turn will come when he will be required to show some favor because of his relationship with Paul and the benefits he received from the Lord and Philemon, through Paul.

Lessons from the Book of Philemon

16) Identity Realigned

- Philemon means Affectionate

Onesimus means Useful (Profitable; beneficial)

- Slave masters are known to be hard hearted and will render punishment to their slaves when necessary. However, Philemon was placed in position to act contrary to societal norms yet aligning with his identity.
- Onesimus, once a slave to man, yet not useful. Once he becomes a slave to righteousness, he aligns with his identity and becomes useful.

References



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