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# Philemon

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Foundations of the Faith

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Rexford MacGregor

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# Philemon

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### *OUTLINE*

<b>Author</b>	Paul
<b>Focus</b>	Philemon
<b>Key Word</b>	Forgiveness
<b>Key Verses</b>	<b>Philemon 16, 17</b>
<b>Location</b>	Rome
<b>Time</b>	c. A.D. 61 – 61
<b>Prayer of Thanksgiving (1 - 7)</b>	
<b>Petition for Onesimus (8 – 16)</b>	
<b>Promise to Philemon (17 – 25)</b>	

Paul writes Philemon, a fellow believer, on behalf of Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave, who was a thief, of no value and deserter, and has now become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul. Paul tactfully and tenderly reminds Philemon of his own debt to Paul for his very salvation.

The forgiveness portrayed in Philemon is a beautiful portrayal of the forgiveness a believer finds in Christ. Motivated by his love for Onesimus, guilty of a great offense, Paul intercedes on Onesimus' behalf. Paul lays aside his rights and becomes Onesimus' substitute by assuming his debt. Philemon's gracious act restores and places Onesimus in a new relationship with his master, Philemon.

### ***Prayer of Thanksgiving***

*Philemon 1-3: Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, 2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. NASU*

*In contrast to the more usual term, "apostle," Paul's designation of himself as prisoner for Jesus Christ has a direct bearing on the theme of the letter*

*The addressee was not only this Christian family, but the church in their home.*

Paul, who is in prison for the work of Christ, suffering and enduring for the cross, notes the common ground of all as believers (Paul, Timothy, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus & the church in your house) and suffering for the gospel; enduring hardships for the gospel (a fellow soldier). Philemon is equally involved in the ministry of the gospel (as Paul, and Timothy) and is an example; others look to him (*Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker*). Paul prays a blessing for Philemon: grace (you might receive that which you did not deserve) and peace (reconciled to and with God our Father [common ground] and the Lord Jesus Christ [his master]). ***Matthew 5:23-24; Romans 5:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-20***

***Matthew 5:23-24: "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.***

***Romans 5:8-10: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.***

***2 Corinthians 5:17-20: Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.***

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*Philemon 4-7: I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; 6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. 7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. NASU*

*Philemon's ministry was invigorated by his understanding of Christian love and truth. Paul rejoices in this and wishes for this motivation to shape Philemon's perspective regarding his runaway slave.*

Paul expresses his gratitude for Philemon's faithfulness and love towards the Lord Jesus, which is revealed in his relationship with Paul and all the saints. Paul notes Philemon's solid understanding of the truth of the gospel was the foundation of his attitudes and actions. Unlike many that Paul worked with in the ministry, Philemon was a leader the church could rightly follow for an effective model of Godly living; bringing a great deal of *joy and comfort* to the imprisoned apostle. Philemon's faithfulness and love were the sources of encouragement and refreshing of *the hearts of the saints*. ***Colossians 1:9-11, 2:1-3***

***Colossians 1:9-11: For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously***

***Colossians 2:1-3: For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***

### ***Petition for Onesimus***

*Philemon 8-16: Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you -- since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus -- 10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; 14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. 15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back 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. NASU*

Paul, as an apostle, with authority in the Church, for the purpose of building up the body of believers, could have ordered Philemon *to do what is proper*, i.e., forgive Onesimus and send him back to Paul. Philemon needs to consider that while away from Philemon, but with Paul, Onesimus had come to faith in Christ and, therefore, was now a brother in Christ too.

Paul acknowledges that before Onesimus (i.e., Useful – his name) came to Christ, he was useless to Philemon; but as a fellow believer, he was valuable and useful to Philemon and Paul. Paul places his relationship with Onesimus on the same level as Philemon and himself, referring to Onesimus as *my very heart*. Paul would have loved to have Onesimus stay with him, but out of respect and love for Philemon, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon.

Paul raises the point to Philemon of the sovereignty of the Lord in all circumstances, noting although Onesimus sinned in running away, God worked in those circumstances to bring Onesimus to the Lord. Onesimus had previously been in a Christian home but had not come to the Lord. This should bring joy to the heart of Philemon, a fellow brother in the Lord; Onesimus' salvation was a far greater result than anything Philemon could have hoped for in the form of justice. ***Ephesians 3:20-21***

***Ephesians 3:20-21: Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.***

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Paul appealed to Philemon, as a *beloved brother* and *fellow worker*, to do the right thing, because it is the right thing to do. Forgiveness must be free will or it is not forgiveness (it may be obedience but not forgiveness). In the sovereign work of God, Onesimus ran away from Philemon and landed at the doorstep of Paul, in prison, that he might come to faith in Christ. *Genesis 50:19-21; Matthew 18:32-35; 2 Corinthians 9:7-8*

*Genesis 50:19-21: But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? 20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. 21 "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

*Matthew 18:32-35: "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?" 34 "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."*

*2 Corinthians 9:7-8: Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;*

In sending Onesimus to Philemon, Paul emphasizes the depth of his care for Onesimus and the usefulness of Onesimus to him, not only in his ministry but also in the work of the Gospel as a whole. Paul calls on Philemon to make his decision based on Onesimus' new relationship with Philemon, as brothers in the Lord, and the Lord's use of Onesimus in the work of the Gospel. *Romans 16:1-2*

*Romans 16:1-2: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; 2 that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.*

### ***Promise to Philemon***

*Philemon 17-19: If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). NASU*

To this point Paul has been laying the groundwork of his request; Paul now calls on Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul, forgiving Onesimus and receiving him as he would any other brother in the Lord. It is likely that Paul may have given Onesimus a new name upon his conversion to the Lord, which was a common practice. To help ease the loss of property (including Onesimus himself) Paul pledges to repay Philemon for whatever Onesimus may owe him. Paul then gently notes that Philemon, himself, is in debt to Paul for his own salvation. *Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Timothy 6:1-2*

*Colossians 3:12-14: So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

*1 Timothy 6:1-2: All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against. 2 Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.*

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*Philemon 20-25: Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. 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. NASU*

Paul concludes by requesting Philemon to bless him in the Lord and bring him joy in the Lord by receiving Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself, and by returning Onesimus to Paul to serve him while he is imprisoned. Paul believes Philemon, as a child of the Lord, will do just as the Lord would do, above and beyond anything Paul could ask him (Ephesians 3:20-21). Paul preferred to rely on the generosity, kindness, and love of Philemon than on begrudging obedience. Paul offers a note of encouragement to Philemon; trusting in his forthcoming release, he plans on visiting Philemon and asks Philemon to prepare a lodging for him and to remember him in his prayers. Paul closes noting the fellow workers in the Lord greet Philemon (and by implication, are looking to Philemon for his response – as are those in the church that meet in his house) and a blessing for Philemon. ***Romans 8:29-33; Philippians 1:25-27; Colossians 1:2-9***

***Romans 8:29-33: For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies***

***Philippians 1:25-26: Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.***

***Colossians 1:7-8: 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.***