

Philemon

Forgiveness

I. Additional Scriptures/Notes...

Book... “Under Roman law, a slave who ran away from his master could face the death penalty. In spite of this possibility, the apostle Paul sent Onesimus, a runaway slave and a recent convert to Christianity, back to his owner Philemon to make restitution. The Epistle to Philemon is Paul’s plea that Onesimus no longer be viewed as a runaway slave, but rather as a ‘beloved brother’ (see vv. 16, 17; Col 4:9). Obedience to these requests would require forgiveness and restoration, actions which no other slave owner would have to contemplate in the ancient world. But Christians were called to a higher calling, one that contradicted the expectations of the culture at large. While the world pursued power and glory, Christians were to pursue the way of the Cross—the way of forgiveness, servanthood, suffering, and love” [*Nelson’s NKJV Study Bible*, p. 2068]. “The letter to Philemon is extraordinary, for in it we see the extraordinary sight of Paul asking a favour. No man ever asked fewer favours than he did, but in this letter he is asking a favour, not so much for himself, as for Onesimus, who had taken the wrong turning and whom Paul was helping to find the way back. Philemon was clearly a man from whom it was easy to ask a favour. He was a man whose faith in Christ and love to the brethren all men knew, and the story of them had reached even Rome, where Paul was in prison. His house must have been like an oasis in a desert, for, as Paul puts it, he had refreshed the hearts of God’s people. It is a lovely thing to go down to history as a man in whose house God’s people were rested and refreshed” [William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*].

Phm 1:1... Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ—“Although technically a prisoner of Rome, Paul always considered that he was actually imprisoned for the gospel, and therefore the prisoner of the Lord” [Coffman].

Phm 1:6... COMMUNICATION—“The Greek word is *koinonia*, and the prayer is that the fellowship of faith between Philemon and Onesimus may become effectual in showing forth forgiveness, which would of course be comprehended in every good thing. Here, however, the statement is general” [B.W. Johnson, *The People’s New Testament*].

Phm 1:7... the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother—“Fundamentally, Paul’s only hope for Onesimus had its fountain in the kind of man Paul knew Philemon to be; therefore, he dwells upon that before making his request. In the last analysis, he will ground his appeal on the fact that Philemon is ‘a brother.’ No higher compliment can be accorded to any Christian” [Coffman]. **REFRESHED**, “This comes from the Greek military term that describes an army at rest from a march” [John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, p. 1892].

Phm 1:11... unprofitable, but now profitable—In the original language, it is easy to see that Paul is using a “play on words” here. UNPROFITABLE, or USELESS is from the Greek word: *achrestos*; whereas, PROFITABLE, or USEFUL is from the Greek word: *euchrestos*. Surely the intended effect of this use of language by Paul would be to cause Philemon to see Onesimus in a different way than, perhaps, he would normally view a runaway slave. This verse actually could be considered a statement of the THEME of the letter—“The theme of Philemon is the power of the gospel to transform lives ... and to impact human relationships (... v., 16)” [*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2353]. Yes, Onesimus had

done wrong in running away; but now he was wanting to make correction for the wrongs he had done.

Phm 1:13... Whom I would have retained with me—“Would gladly have kept him with me to render for thee the service you would be glad to give me while I am in chains, only (14) without thy mind would I do nothing. He wished, if such a service was rendered, it might be with Philemon's free consent” [B.W. Johnson, *The People's New Testament*].

Phm 1:18... If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account—“Many believe that Onesimus robbed his master before he ran off, 'but of this there is no evidence. Why then impute crimes to men where there is no proof?.' 'Had the apostle been sure that Onesimus had robbed his master, he certainly would not have spoken in this hypothetical way” [Coffman].

Phm 1:19... albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides—“Here is a reminder that Philemon owed his salvation to Paul, a reminder which would certainly prevent him from putting in a claim against the apostle” [B.W. Johnson, *The People's New Testament*].

II. Chronology.

BIBLE PERIOD: **The Period of the Church.**

III. Summary.

If every member of the church would study Philemon before writing to another brother, the church would benefit greatly. This letter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is a gem to be treasured as a model in the matter of courteous discourse. Paul had a specific object in mind and that was for Onesimus, a runaway slave, to be received warmly by Philemon. Who could doubt that, Philemon, having read this letter, would do anything but submit to Paul's request?

IV. Outline.

1. The salutation (Philemon 1-3).
2. The gracious thanksgiving (4-7).
3. The request and intercession (8-21).
4. Paul proposes a return visit to Philemon (22).
5. Paul's closing remembrance (23-25).

V. Questions.

True or False

01. _____ Paul was a prisoner when he wrote to Philemon.
02. _____ Philemon was a runaway slave.
03. _____ Onesimus was once unprofitable to Philemon.
04. _____ Philemon owed Paul.
05. _____ Paul had no hope of being released from prison.

Multiple Choice (Select the BEST Answer)

06. _____ In this letter, Paul describes himself as: (a) free; (b) a debtor; (c) aged.
07. _____ How many of the 25 verses of this letter indicate that Paul was a prisoner: (a) 3; (b) 4; (c) 5; (d) none.
08. _____ What did Paul say may have been the reason Onesimus left Philemon: (a) Philemon mistreated him; (b) to earn some money; (c) just for a season so that he might be with Philemon forever.

09. _____ How did Paul ask Philemon to receive Onesimus: (a) as a slave; (b) as a man; 9c) as he would receive Paul.
10. _____ What did Paul tell Philemon to do if Onesimus owed him anything: (a) forgive the debt; (b) make him pay it; (c) put it on Paul’s account.

Fill in the Blanks

11. **I beseech thee for my _____, whom I have _____ in my bonds.**
12. **Whom I have sent again: thou therefore _____ him, that is, _____.**
13. The word RECEIVE is found in verses: _____, _____, _____.
14. **If thou count me therefore a _____, _____ him as myself.**
15. Paul had a lot of confidence in Philemon and felt sure that he would do _____ | _____.

Each Question is worth 7 Points

My Score is: _____

VI. Lessons & Applications.

1. “The object of the letter was to intercede with Philemon to forgive the runaway slave, and to receive him as a Christian brother. Paul himself offering to repay the stolen money. The Letter is a perfect gem for its Courtesy, Tact, Delicacy, and Generosity, climaxing with its tender appeal to Philemon to receive Onesimus ‘as you would receive me’ (17)” [Halley’s Handbook, p. 645].
2. The 3-Fold Message of the Epistle...
 - 1) A plea for reconciliation of two children of God.
 - 2) Forgiveness.
 - 3) Do what is right.
3. Philemon relates to the overall theme of the Bible in that it shows that the salvation of man is the salvation of ALL men (i.e., it is available to all men, EVEN the lowly slave).
4. “NOTE the Appeals used by Paul in the Epistle:
 - 1) I am a prisoner (1, 9).
 - 2) There is a love between us (1).
 - 3) I am thankful for you (4, 7).
 - 4) I pray for you (4).
 - 5) You have refreshed the hearts of saints (7).
 - 6) I don’t order you, I rather appeal.
 - 7) I am an old man.
 - 8) I have won Onesimus to Christ (10).
 - 9) He is now profitable to us both (11).
 - 10) Sending him back is like sending my own heart.
 - 11) You may now have him forever (15).
 - 12) He is now your brother (16).
 - 13) Receive him as you would receive me (17).
 - 14) I will pay whatever he owes you (18-19a).
 - 15) Don’t forget that you owe yourself to me (19b).
 - 16) I have great confidence in you (21).
 - 17) I’m coming to visit you (22).”

--[Field, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, p. 254].
5. A KEY WORD of the epistle is RECEIVE (12, 15, 17).
6. “Paul presents a picture of a Christian home in apostolic days—

- 1) The father and mother well known for their hospitality.
 - 2) The son a man of position and importance in the church.
 - 3) The coming and going of Christian brethren.
 - 4) The life of the brotherhood centering about this household.”
[ISBE, s.v., “Philemon, Epistle to”].
7. “We see Paul’s use of LOGIC—He makes an argument on LOVE (5, 16)—
- 1) Philemon loves the brethren (5).
 - 2) Onesimus is a brother (16).
 - 3) Therefore, Philemon must show love to Onesimus!”
[Tom Holland, *The Living Messages of the Books of the New Testament*, p. 254].
8. We should **CONDESCEND TO MEN OF LOW ESTATE** (Rom 12:16; Philemon 10-11). No one could have been lower than a runaway slave in the city of Rome. The economic level, occupational pursuit, geographical location, color of the skin, quality of clothing, social caste, are totally irrelevant to the preaching of the gospel. The ground is level at the foot of the cross (cf., Js 2:1-13).
9. Christ makes a man PROFITABLE (11). The name ONESIMUS means profitable. Onesimus had become Unprofitable to Philemon. After contacting Christ, he once again became profitable.
10. The CHRISTIAN is presented in Scripture as...
- 1) A FELLOW LABORER (Philemon 1, 24), emphasizing the need to work for the Lord.
 - 2) A FELLOWSOLDIER (Philemon 2), emphasizing the importance of fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tm 6:12).
 - 3) A FELLOWPRISONER (Philemon 23), emphasizing the need to be willing to endure suffering for Christ (1 Pet 2:19-20).
 - 4) A FELLOWCITIZEN (Eph 2:19), emphasizing the importance of being loyal to the kingdom of Christ.
 - 5) A FELLOWHEIR (Eph 3:6), emphasizing the blessings available in Christ (Eph 1:3), which must motivate us to greater service for the Lord.
 - 6) A FELLOWHELPER (3 John 8), emphasizing the need for cooperation among brethren.
 - 7) A FELLOWSERVANT (Col 1:7), emphasizing the place of ministry and service.
11. We can learn from Paul something about “PROSPECTS FOR CONVERSION.” Paul had looked upon Onesimus, a **runaway slave**, as a precious soul who needed to hear the gospel message.

VII. Seek-A-Word Puzzle.

I H A V E B E G O T T E N A A W F H R I
 E D J L B Y T H E E B R O T H E R I P C
 M B L D E A R L Y B E L O V E D E N R V
 N B H O X J U H I A S V S H E I F M I M
 O N M G B V E C H M L D W H U Z R Y S M
 I O Y X V R K E A D D L N A P A E P O U
 T I S S Q E A E U S O F S R P Y S R N Q
 A T O A Z R S S G R H C U A M W H A E N
 C N N I O O S E Y N R I A S I Z E Y R U
 I E O N T B E B D O F D X U P N D E W R
 N M N T H A V R E M N C Q H W E T R H O
 U G E S Y L O E G E I E E G E O M S H E
 M N S U P W L H A L O T T C B D B C U U
 M I I S J O R T E I J P L T R M I V V D
 O K M E C L O A H H N B B A F R F O G J
 C A U J V L F R T P E I W I R R X I M H
 T M S D T E O I L S O O K O P W R C M K
 C B O R R F C X U V T R Y H S T M R E F
 Y J D O Z H B C A W O S C R A I X N I L
 X J J L M B W T P E X M D X K F U D R L

[The words (or word locaters) listed below are to be found in the text of our lesson. They also are found in the puzzle above. This is just one more way to reinforce what you have studied from the text. Why not read the whole verse where the word is found one more time as you do the puzzle? Thank you for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. Let's desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow (1 Pet 2:2). DRL]

Philemon

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Philemon, 1 | refreshed, 7 |
| dearly beloved, 1 | by thee, brother, 7 |
| fellow laborer, 1 | bold, 8 |
| making mention, 4 | to enjoin, 8 |
| in my prayers, 4 | for love's sake, 9 |
| toward, 5 | I rather beseech, 9 |
| Lord Jesus, 5 | Paul the aged, 9 |
| all saints, 5 | prisoner, 9 |
| communication, 6 | my son Onesimus, 10 |
| saints, 7 | I have begotten, 10 |

You can find a Crossword Puzzle on Philemon at: <http://q.fu.sl.pt>