



# The Epistle To Philemon



**A Study Guide With Introductory Comments,  
Summaries, Outlines, And Review Questions**

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# The Epistle To Philemon

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This study guide was developed in preparation for teaching adult Bible classes.

- ◆ The objectives for each section are usually things I plan to emphasize during the class.
- ◆ I have found that summarizing and outlining helps me to better understand the Word of God. It is a practice I highly recommend to others.
- ◆ I generally delete the answers to the review questions before printing the material and giving it to the students. But that you might know what answers were intended by the questions, I have included them in these guides.

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The outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style. To God be the glory!

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# The Epistle To Philemon

## Introduction

### AUTHOR

**Paul**, the apostle of Jesus Christ (**1,9,19**).

### PLACE OF WRITING

**Rome**, about the same time the epistle to the Colossians was written. This deduction is based upon the following:

- ◆ Like the epistle to the Colossians, the epistle to Philemon was written when Paul was in chains (**1,10,13,23**)
- ◆ Timothy joined Paul in both epistles (**1; Co 1:1**)
- ◆ Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke joined in the salutation of both (**23,24; Co 4:10-14**)
- ◆ Onesimus, the subject of this epistle, was one of the messengers by whom the epistle to the Colossians was sent (**Co 4:7-9**)
- ◆ Archippus, to whom this epistle is partially addressed (**2**), is also addressed in the epistle to the Colossians (**Co 4:17**)

### TIME OF WRITING

If the epistle to Philemon was written about the time Colossians and the other "prison epistles" (Ephesians and Philippians) were written, then it was written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome, sometime during the period of **61-63 A.D.**

### BACKGROUND OF THE EPISTLE

**Philemon** was a member of the church at **Colosse** (cf. **1,2**, with **Co 4:17**), and a very hospitable one at that (**1,2,5,7**). It is possible that he was one of Paul's own converts (**19**). It is also plausible that **Apphia** was his wife, and **Archippus** his son (**1,2**).

**Onesimus** had been one of Philemon's slaves (**16**), who had run away (**15**). It appears that he somehow traveled to **Rome** where he found Paul and was converted to Christ (**10**). He had become very dear to Paul, and was proving to be very useful (**11-13**).

But Paul did not think it right to keep Onesimus in Rome, and was sending him back to Philemon (12-14). This letter to Philemon is an appeal for him to receive Onesimus now as a brother in Christ, and for him to forgive Onesimus if he had done any wrong (15-21).

## PURPOSE OF WRITING

From the content of the epistle, it appears that Paul had both a primary and secondary purpose:

- ◆ Primarily to secure forgiveness for Onesimus
- ◆ But also to provide from himself a place of lodging after his release from imprisonment (22)

## THE VALUE OF THIS EPISTLE

This short, but valuable epistle has been described as:

- ◆ A Model Of Christian Courtesy
- ◆ A Manifestation Of Christian Love
- ◆ A Monument Of Christian Conversion

Perhaps this is why the Holy Spirit deemed it proper to preserve it for our benefit.

## KEY PASSAGE: Philemon 10,11

*"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me."*

## BRIEF OUTLINE

Paul's Courtesy (1-3)

Paul's Compliment (4-7)

Paul's Counsel (8-21)

Paul's Conclusion (22-25)

A detailed outline of the epistle can be found in the material on Chapter One.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION

1) Who is the author of this epistle?

- Paul

- 2) **Where was he writing from?**
  - Rome
- 3) **Approximately when was this epistle written?**
  - Sometime between 61-63 A.D.
- 4) **What other epistles were written by Paul about the same time?**
  - Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians
- 5) **What church possibly met in Philemon's home?**
  - The church at Colosse
- 6) **Who was Onesimus?**
  - A runaway slave that had belonged to Philemon
- 7) **What was Paul's purpose in writing this epistle?**
  - To secure forgiveness for Onesimus
  - To provide for himself a place of lodging after his release from imprisonment
- 8) **What are the key verses to this epistle?**
  - Philemon 10-11

# The Epistle To Philemon

## Chapter One

### OBJECTIVES IN STUDYING THIS CHAPTER

- 1) To be impressed with the loving hospitality which characterized the Christians in the early church
- 2) To learn lessons in the use of tact in dealing with others

### SUMMARY

In this very short and personal epistle, Paul addresses it to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus and to the church in their house. But it soon becomes evident that its contents are directed toward Philemon, a beloved friend and fellow laborer with Paul (1-3).

After his salutation, Paul expresses his thanks for the noble qualities which have characterized Philemon in the past, especially his love for the saints. It is because of Philemon's past performance that Paul is confident his plea will be carried out faithfully (4-7).

Paul's plea concerns Onesimus, a slave who had run away from Philemon. Somehow he had run into Paul at Rome and was now a new convert to Jesus Christ. As a brother in Christ, Onesimus had made himself very useful to Paul in Rome. But because he still legally belongs to Philemon, Paul is sending him back with a plea that Onesimus be forgiven and received as a brother in the Lord. Paul also offers to pay any restitution which may be owed Philemon by Onesimus (8-21).

The epistle ends with a request for lodging in the near future, and with sundry greetings from individuals who were with Paul in Rome (22-25).

### OUTLINE

#### I. SALUTATION (1-3)

##### A. FROM... (1a)

1. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus
2. Timothy, a brother

##### B. TO... (1b-2)

1. Philemon, a beloved friend and fellow laborer
2. Apphia
3. Archippus, a fellow soldier
4. The church in their house

##### C. GREETINGS (3)

1. Grace and peace
2. From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

## **II. THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER (4-7)**

### **A. PAUL'S THANKFULNESS (4-5)**

1. Expressed in frequent prayers to God
2. For Philemon's love and faith toward Jesus and all the saints

### **B. PAUL'S PRAYER (6-7)**

1. That the sharing of Philemon's faith might be effective
2. Through the acknowledgment of every good thing in Philemon
3. For example, the joy and comfort experienced by Paul from Philemon's love, as Paul hears of how he refreshed the hearts of the saints

## **III. THE PLEA FOR ONESIMUS (8-21)**

### **A. AN APPEAL, NOT A COMMAND (8-9)**

1. Paul had the authority to command what is fitting
2. He chose instead to make an appeal based upon...
  - a. Love itself
  - b. Paul's "age"
  - c. His imprisonment

### **B. PAUL'S PLEA (10-20)**

1. Concerns Onesimus (10-11)
  - a. Who was converted by Paul while in chains, and is now like a son to him
  - b. Who though once was unprofitable to Philemon, is now profitable to both him and Paul
2. Paul is now sending Onesimus back to Philemon (12-14)
  - a. Though he is very dear to Paul
  - b. Though Paul wished to keep him and have him work in Philemon's behalf in the gospel
  - c. But Paul did not want to do anything without Philemon's whole-hearted consent
3. Paul's desire is that Philemon receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ (15-17)
  - a. Perhaps his running away was for this purpose, that he might become a beloved brother in the Lord
  - b. So if Philemon considered himself a partner of Paul, Paul asks that he receive Onesimus as he would Paul himself
4. Paul offers to repay Philemon (18-19)
  - a. For any wrong that Onesimus might have done
  - b. Of course, Philemon already owed Paul his own life
5. By receiving Onesimus in this way, Philemon could give Paul joy and a refreshed heart in the Lord (20)

### **C. PAUL'S CONFIDENCE IN PHILEMON (21)**

1. In Philemon's obedience
2. That Philemon will do even more than what Paul is asking for

#### **IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS (22-25)**

##### **A. REQUEST FOR LODGING (22)**

1. That Paul might be able to stay with Philemon
2. For Paul is confident that through the prayers of Philemon he will soon be able to come to him

##### **B. GREETINGS FROM OTHERS (23-24)**

1. Epaphras, a fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus
2. Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, fellow laborers with Paul

##### **C. A CLOSING PRAYER (25)**

### **REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE CHAPTER**

#### **1) List the main points of this epistle**

- Salvation (1-3)
- Thanksgiving & Prayer (4-7)
- The Plea For Onesimus (8-21)
- Concluding Remarks (22-25)

#### **2) Why does Paul refer to himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus? (1)**

- He was "in chains" (also under house arrest, awaiting trial)
- But note also that he says "of Christ", for it was while engaged in HIS service and thus for HIS sake he was imprisoned

#### **3) Why the mention of Timothy? (1)**

- He was with Paul at Rome
- Also, it is possible that he was acquainted with Philemon

#### **4) What does Philemon's name mean? Did he live up to it?**

- His name means "one that is affectionate"
- Yes! cf. verse 5 and 7

#### **5) Who, possibly, are Apphia and Archippus? (2)**

- Apphia may have been the wife of Philemon
- Archippus may have been their son, also the minister for the church in Colosse (cf. **Co 4:17**)

#### **6) Is this letter primarily to Philemon, or to all?**

- To Philemon (note the use of the singular in verses 4-21)
- Though by mentioning the others, perhaps Paul was soliciting their help to encourage Philemon

- 7) What is a good example of this family's devotion to Christ and of their hospitality to the saints? (2)**  
- It appears that they let the church meet in their home
- 8) Define the terms "grace" and "peace" (3)**  
- Grace: favor that is unmerited  
- Peace: harmony (e.g., with God, self, and others), the result of God's grace
- 9) How could Paul have heard about Philemon? (4,5)**  
- From Epaphras, who was a member of the church at Epaphras (**Co 4:12,13**)  
- From Onesimus himself
- 10) What good things had Paul heard concerning Philemon? (5)**  
- His love and faith toward Christ and the saints
- 11) What are some examples of Philemon's love for the saints?**  
- Letting the church meet in his home (**1**)  
- Refreshing the hearts of the saints (**7**)  
- Preparing guest rooms (**22**)
- 12) What does Paul pray for in behalf of Philemon? (6)**  
- That the sharing of his faith may become effective
- 13) How is this prayer related to the plea which follows in verses 8-21?**  
- Carrying out Paul's plea concerning Onesimus would be one way of assuring that Philemon's faith in its sharing would be effective
- 14) What had given Paul great joy and comfort in his imprisonment? (7)**  
- Philemon's love and the way the saints have been refreshed by him
- 15) How does Paul re-emphasize his close feelings for Philemon? (7)**  
- By calling him "brother"
- 16) What does the word "therefore" indicate? (8)**  
- That Paul's plea for Onesimus is predicated upon Philemon's past behavior mentioned in verses 4-7
- 17) What could Paul have done in this matter? (8)**  
- Simply commanded Philemon to do what is proper
- 18) What does Paul do instead? (9)**  
- He "appeals" to Philemon
- 19) Why does Paul call himself "the aged"? (9)**  
- Perhaps to appeal to Philemon's sympathy  
- Paul is probably about sixty years old at this time, but in light of bodily injuries incurred throughout

his ministry (cf. **2 Co 11:23-29**), he was likely older than his years would normally indicate

**20) Why does he again refer to himself as a prisoner? (9)**

- Perhaps to tactfully remind Philemon that since Paul had suffered so much in service to Christ, certainly Philemon could honor his request

**21) In the original language, where does the name "Onesimus" appear in the sentence? (10)**

- At the end: "I appeal to you for my son, whom I have begotten while in my chains, ONESIMUS."

**22) What significance might there be in placing Onesimus' name at the end of the sentence?**

- Possibly that Paul is tactfully preparing Philemon to honor Paul's request by saying what he does before mentioning a name that is likely to bring bad memories to Philemon

**23) What does Paul call Onesimus? What does it mean? (10)**

- "My son"
- Like Timothy, this convert of Paul had become like a son to him

**24) What does the name "Onesimus" mean?**

- "Profitable", or "useful"

**25) How had becoming a Christian changed Onesimus? (11)**

- Prior to his conversion, he was "unprofitable" (as a runaway slave)
- Now, he was "profitable" to both Paul and Philemon
- Thus he was now living up to his name!

**26) What does Paul want Philemon to do in regard to Onesimus? (12)**

- Receive him

**27) How does Paul express further what Onesimus has meant to him? (12)**

- He refers to Onesimus as "my own heart"

**28) What had Paul wished to do with Onesimus? (13)**

- To keep him, and let him serve Paul in the gospel

**29) Why had Paul refrained from doing what he wished? (14)**

- He did not want to do anything without Philemon's whole-hearted consent

**30) What did Paul see as the "possible" reason for this turn of events? (15)**

- The providence of God
- Note that Paul says "perhaps"; Paul recognized that we cannot always be certain as to why things happen the way they do (just as Mordecai said in **Esther 4:14**), and whether it is always the Lord's doing

**31) How did Paul want Philemon to receive Onesimus? (16)**

- No longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother

**32) Upon what basis does Paul ask Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul himself?**

**(17)**

- If he considered Paul as a partner

**33) What is Paul willing to do in behalf of Onesimus? (18-19)**

- Pay back anything Onesimus might owe Philemon

**34) What indicates that Paul may have personally converted Philemon to the gospel? (19)**

- Paul's statement, "you owe me even your own self"

**35) How will Philemon's forgiveness of Onesimus affect Paul? (20)**

- Despite being in chains, Paul will have joy and be refreshed in his heart

**36) Was Paul in doubt about Philemon's response to his request? (21)**

- No, he had confidence that Philemon would do even more than what Paul asked

**37) How could Philemon do more than what Paul had asked of him?**

- He could free Onesimus
- He could give him spare time to evangelize
- He could treat other slaves with similar compassion

**38) How might Paul's request for lodging tactfully induce Philemon to honor his request for Onesimus? (22)**

- Philemon would know that Paul would soon be able to witness firsthand Philemon's response to the plea for Onesimus

**39) Where else do we read of these men who accompany Paul in sending greetings to Philemon? (23,24)**

- All of them are mentioned in **Co 4:10-14**
- Epaphras (**Co 1:7; 4:12,13**)
- Mark (**Ac 12:12,25; 13:5,13; 15:36-40; 2 Ti 4:11; 1 Pe 5:13**)
- Aristarchus (**Ac 19:29; 20:4; 27:2**)
- Demas (**2 Ti 4:10**)
- Luke (The "we" sections of **Acts, 2 Ti 4:11**)

**40) What is Paul's concluding prayer for Philemon? (25)**

- "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."