

Easy-to-Read Version

Language: English

Provided by: Bible League International

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PDF generated on 2017-07-07 from source files dated 2017-07-07.

9417f999-1fb5-525b-a123-d5d84a7f35e1

ISBN: 978-1-5313-1294-7

Philemon

Philemon was a follower of Jesus who lived in the town of Colossae. He had heard the Good News about Jesus from Paul. But Paul had never been in Colossae. So perhaps Philemon had met Paul when he was in Ephesus. Philemon and others had helped to start churches in this region, which is now the south-western part of Turkey. These churches met in homes to encourage each other. They prayed, sang and read Scripture together. One of these groups gathered in Philemon's house in Colossae.

Paul was in prison, either in Ephesus or Rome, when he wrote this letter to Philemon. Paul was writing for a man named Onesimus, a slave who belonged to Philemon. And it seems Onesimus had done something that resulted in a great loss for his master.

The Roman Empire was full of slaves. In Paul's time, almost a fourth of the people in Rome were slaves. Slaves were living tools of their masters. Slaves were taken from their families. They often had to learn a new language. They had no control of their time. They had to work hard at difficult jobs in their master's business or house. Some took care of their master's children.

Onesimus may have come to Paul because he knew of Paul's friendship with Philemon. If so, Onesimus hoped that Paul would be able to help him make things right with his master. No one knows for sure

what brought Onesimus and Paul together. But their meeting led to Onesimus' becoming a follower of Jesus. So Paul was like a father to Onesimus, just as he was also a spiritual father to Philemon.

Paul writes this letter to ask Philemon to forgive Onesimus and accept him now as a brother in God's family. Philemon would have known Paul's teaching. He would have heard about Jesus and a different way of life in his kingdom. In this new society, differences of race, rank or background did not matter. Even people who hated each other could learn to love each other. Paul showed people how to seek peace with others in spite of their differences. As they learned to follow Jesus' example, they would become united as a community of believers. This letter shows Paul's view of this new community. He makes it clear that God expects all who belong to Jesus to accept each other.

In this letter from prison, Paul...

Greets and prays for Philemon and the church meeting in his house (1-7)

Makes an appeal for Onesimus, Philemon's slave (8-22)

Gives greetings from the men who are with him (23-25)

1 Greetings from Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus,* and from Timothy, our brother.

To Philemon, our dear friend and worker with us. ² Also to our sister Apphia, to Archippus, who serves with us in the fight against evil, and to the church that meets in your home.

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

***1:1 Christ Jesus** Or "King Jesus". The term "Christ" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah", a royal title. See Mark 15:32; Luke 23:2. See also Christ and Messiah in the Word List.

Philemon's Love and Faith

⁴I remember you in my prayers. And I always thank my God for you. ⁵I thank God because I hear about the love and loyalty that you have for the Lord Jesus and that you show to all God's holy people. ⁶You, Philemon, have the same faith we have. And I pray that this faith we have will cause you to understand all the good we have experienced that leads us to be like Christ. ⁷My brother, you have shown love to God's people, and your help has greatly encouraged them. And this has been a great joy and encouragement to me.

Accept Onesimus as a Brother

⁸That's why I am asking you to do something you should do. With the authority I have from Christ, I could command you to do it. ⁹But I am not commanding you; I am asking you to do it out of love. I, Paul, am an old man now, and I am a prisoner for Christ Jesus. ¹⁰I am asking you to do this for Onesimus. I consider him to be my son because here in prison I brought him into the new life we have from the Lord. ¹¹In the past he was useless to you. But now he has become useful[†] for both you and me.

¹²I am sending him back to you, but it's like losing part of myself.[‡] ¹³I wanted to keep him here to help me while I am still in prison for telling the Good News. By helping me here, he would be representing you. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without asking you first. Then whatever good thing you may do for me

will be what you want to do, not what I forced you to do.

¹⁵Onesimus was separated from you for a short time. Maybe that happened so that you could have him back forever, ¹⁶but not as a slave. He will be more than a slave for you. He will be a dear brother. That's what he is to me. And I know he will mean even more to you, both as a part of your family and as one who shares your faith in the Lord.

¹⁷You accept me as one who shares your faith. So accept Onesimus back as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done any wrong to you or owes you anything, charge that to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this in my own handwriting: I will pay back anything Onesimus owes. And I will say nothing about what you owe me for your own life. ²⁰So, my brother, as a follower of the Lord please do this favour[¶] for me. It would be such a great encouragement to me as your brother in Christ. ²¹I write this letter knowing that you will do what I ask, and even more than I ask.

²²Also, please prepare a room for me. I hope that God will answer your prayers and that I will be able to come and see you.

Final Greetings

²³Epaphras is a prisoner with me for Christ Jesus. He sends you his greetings. ²⁴Also Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke send their greetings. They are workers together with me.

²⁵May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with each one of you.

[†]**1:11** *useless ... useful* Paul here makes a play on words with the name Onesimus, which means "useful".

[‡]**1:12** Literally, "I am sending him, that is, my own insides." This is a way of saying that sending Onesimus away was for Paul like losing something very important to him.

[¶]**1:20** *please do this favour* Paul here makes another wordplay on the name Onesimus, using a verb related to it.