

FILLMORE STUDY BIBLE

Paul's Letter to Philemon

Metaphysically Interpreted



FILLMORE BIBLE SOCIETY

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<https://fillmore.bible>

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Front cover image: Rembrandt, "Saint Paul at His Writing Desk," ca. 1629. Public Domain.
Back cover image: Wood sculpture, Unity of Shreveport.

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The Fillmore Bible Society

The Fillmore Bible Society are collaborators who comb through dozens of metaphysical books written by Charles Fillmore and his students as well as over 70 years of Fillmore articles and sermons for metaphysical insights into the Bible. They edit and submit these insights as short annotations which are then applied to the text of the text of the World English Bible, a contemporary-language update of the American Standard Version of the Bible, both online and in print.

This collaboration project is managed by TruthUnity Ministries, which is the publisher of The Fillmore Study Bible. In time the Fillmore Bible Society will become free-standing with its own board, Editorial staff and peer-review committee.

Members of the Fillmore Bible Society include:



Rev. Dan Beckett. Mark, Colossians.



Thomas Scheinler. Acts, Galatians.



Rev. Lisa Herklotz and Rev Jim Ernstsén.
Revelation to John.



Susan St John. Hebrews.



Rev. Mark Hicks. General Editor. John,
Acts, Romans, Corinthians 1.



Rev. Michelle Vargas. Luke.



Mary Salama. Matthew, Corinthians 2,
Thessalonians 1 & 2, Timothy 1 & 2,
Titus, Peter 1 & 2, Jude.

The Fillmore Study Bible

The Fillmore Study Bible provides the reader with an introduction to metaphysical Bible interpretation by offering annotations and commentary from the works of Charles Fillmore and his students. Many Bible students learn their theology by reading the annotations and commentary of study Bibles. Study Bibles have a theological point of view, typically Catholic, Evangelical or Mainline Protestant. The Fillmore Study Bible makes this method of study available to the Metaphysical Christian.

Metaphysical Christianity is an authentic and distinct expression of the historic Christian faith that acknowledges and embraces the influence of Platonic and Stoic Greek philosophy in the early development of Christian theology. Much of this influence has been suppressed in orthodox Bible commentaries because metaphysical interpretation relies on an inner knowingness as authority for spiritual matters. The annotations included here embrace inner knowingness as authority.

This study bible uses the *World English Bible* translation, which is a contemporary-language update of the bible used by Charles Fillmore, the American Standard Version. The language

of the WEB is not American nor British, but *contemporary, world* English, making the text pleasant to read for the broadest possible audience of global English speakers. The WEB differs from several contemporary-language translations by not adopting gender neutral language but it has provided footnotes when gender neutral language would be appropriate.

We believe that our present day culture of information, science and technology is ready to restore to it's spiritual teachings the perspectives of original thinkers who gave us not only mathematics, ethics, democracy and medicine, but also deep insights into the inner world of soul and Divine mind—the Greek metaphysicians. We also believe that contemporary Christianity needs a contemporary, global interpretation applied to a contemporary, global biblical text. The Fillmore Study Bible is our offering for addressing these spiritual needs.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON



Rembrandt, "Saint Paul at His Writing Desk," ca. 1629. Public Domain.

INTRODUCTION TO PHILEMON

In order to understand this Epistle, some background information is necessary; we should know something about the persons involved, and also Paul's purpose in writing. The following details will be found helpful.

Philemon was a wealthy member of the church at Colossae, and had been converted through Paul's preaching. The Epistle indicates that a warm friendship existed between the apostle and his convert. As was customary in those days, Philemon owned several slaves; among these was a young man named Onesimus. But this young man robbed his master probably taking money and clothing—and had sought his freedom by running away from what he regarded as his house of bondage. In those days, if a runaway slave was caught he was severely beaten, and this punishment often resulted in death. But Onesimus was not caught. Apparently he made his way to the nearest seaport, and after stowing away on a waiting ship, he finally arrived at Rome.

It would appear that sometime during Paul's imprisonment at Rome, he needed a messenger who could also perform other personal duties; and the apostle was able to

secure the services of a bright young man, who happened to be in the vicinity seeking employment. Paul became very fond of this young man, and soon brought about his conversion. Then the young man confessed that he was Onesimus, the runaway slave of Paul's friend Philemon—and at the same time begged Paul to keep him as his own personal slave. However, Paul saw that this was a dangerous thing to do, since discovery would lead to imprisonment, perhaps death, for the young man.

Paul therefore wrote a letter to the young man's master, Philemon, making Onesimus the bearer of the letter; and the apostle called upon a trusted worker, Tychicus, to accompany the runaway slave to Colossae. It will be recalled that Tychicus carried the Epistle to the Colossians, and his presence would guarantee the safe arrival of Onesimus. (See Col. 4:7-9.) In his letter, Paul reminded Philemon of his conversion, with its rich spiritual experiences, and his indebtedness to the apostle in this regard. Paul then suggested that Philemon could repay this debt—at least, in part—by freeing Onesimus, and receiving him, not merely as a returning slave, but as a Christian brother.

The Epistle to Philemon should be carefully read, and the reader should note how Paul presents his extraordinary request, and how he advances his arguments, step by step, in a sure and loving way. Note how Paul makes himself responsible for the repayment of whatever was stolen by Onesimus—"Charge that to my account"—but at the same time subtly reminds Philemon of his own indebtedness to the writer of the Epistle. (See verses 18-20.) A request presented in this masterly way could not be denied!

Metaphysical meaning: As a starting point, it will be well to note the meaning of the names: *Onesimus* means "useful," or "helpful"; *Paul* represents "the freeing word of Truth"; and *Philemon* may be interpreted as "loving," or "affectionate." Careful thought should be given to the following details:

1. Onesimus was a slave. This reminds us that there are times when we may enter into some sort of bondage—bondage of habit, error thought, lack, limitation, and so on. Under such circumstances, instead of being "useful," we may become "useless"—and instead of being "helpful," we may feel "helpless."
2. Onesimus tried to escape from his bondage. We may seek to do likewise. However, like Onesimus, we soon discover that we do not gain freedom by attempting to run away from our bondage. Actually, bondage is a state of consciousness; and we carry our consciousness with us wherever we go.
3. Onesimus came into contact with Paul. This was a very important step in the young man's quest for freedom—although at first glance, this may appear as a "lucky break." However, the young man was willing to listen to, and be guided by, the apostle. We too make real progress when we listen to and receive the word of Truth. Long ago, Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). The study of Truth helps us to realize that we are sons of God, not slaves; and when this freeing word of Truth is established within our consciousness, the outer manifestation of freedom soon follows.
4. Onesimus was sent back to Colossae. At first glance, this may seem like an anticlimax to the story. However, it should be noted that Onesimus' return brought about a complete change in his status; for he was no longer to function as a slave, but was to be regarded as a beloved brother in Christ. Similarly, there are times when we must return to our "Colossae"—the places, persons, or conditions that we associate with our bondage. But, like Onesimus, we shall find that things are different—because we are different! When we realize the truth regarding ourselves, we are then able to see Truth operating in persons and conditions around us. "Philemon" is no longer an exacting taskmaster, for we now recognize him as being "loving," "affectionate"! Truly, Christ in us is our hope of glory.

At this point, inquiry may be made regarding Paul's activities after writing the Epistles

discussed above. Was he released from his imprisonment? What otherwise befell him? Unfortunately, the Book of Acts closes with Paul's imprisonment at Rome, and the reader is left in doubt. However, there are several indications in other parts of the New Testament of Paul's further meaningful activities and writings, and these will form the subject of the next lesson.

 Introduction to *Paul's Letter to Philemon* by Herbert J. Hunt, former Dean of Bible Studies for the Unity School of Christianity.

When Paul writes, presumably in about 52 CE, to Philemon ("phi-LEE-mon"), who has been wronged in some way by Onesimus ("o-NEE-see-mus"), he uses his best persuasive abilities, wisdom and love. The traditional view that Onesimus is a run-away slave may be true, but it is disputed by some scholars today. Regardless, Onesimus is in debt to Philemon and Paul writes to get Philemon to forgive the debt.

The Metaphysical Bible Dictionary says that Philemon represents "a thought that belongs to the love nature in man, and becomes deeply attached to the Christ Truth" and Turner says, "the epistle expresses to the fullest the apostle's compassionate spirit" (:135). Obviously, Paul is appealing to the love faculty of Philemon, which is the attracting, harmonizing, unifying faculty of mind; it is the constructive, building force of Spirit and our power to comprehend Oneness.

When Paul writes "formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me" (1:11) and "if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (1:18), "Paul is appealing to Philemon's faculty of judgment, which is the faculty by which we appraise, evaluate, and discern in order to make correct decisions.

 Introduction to *Paul's Letter to Philemon* by Mary Salama.

PHILEMON 1

The Word addresses a friend of Truth

^{1:1} Paul, a prisoner^① of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

to Philemon,^② our beloved fellow worker, ^{1:2} to the beloved Apphia, to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the assembly in your house:

^{1:3} Grace to you and peace^③ from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. *Paul, a prisoner.* In this letter, Paul represents the Word; the prison represents the center from

which the will rules. When the will imprisons the Word, the activity of the Spirit seems inhibited.

2. *Philemon.* Philemon was the owner of Onesimus, a slave. Philemon had been converted to Christianity by Paul; his name means *friendship*; he was a friend of Truth. Philemon (*loving, affectionate*) represents a thought that belongs to the love nature in man and that becomes devoted to the Christ Truth. This thought is established in substance and power (Philemon was wealthy and influential).

3. *grace, peace.* Grace: see verse 25 below; peace: harmony and tranquillity derived from awareness of the Christ consciousness. (RW/peace)

Paul Appeals to Higher Consciousness

^{1:4} I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, ^{1:5} hearing of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; ^{1:6} that the fellowship of your faith may become effective, ¹ in the knowledge of every good thing which is in us in Christ Jesus. ^{1:7} For we have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. ²

1. *may become effective.* Paul recalls Philemon's reputation for faith both as an individual follower of the Christ and as a member of the entire Christian brotherhood. The inference is that Philemon will wish to sustain his reputation as a follower of the Christ.

2. *refreshed through you, brother.* The mind of Christ refreshes the heart by leading its possessor to forgive fully and freely in order to get the wrong out of mind as quickly as possible and so permit the expressing of good will, knowing also that the harboring of grudges injures the one who harbors them, as well as the one against whom they are directed.

Paul's Plea for Oneness

^{1:8} Therefore, though I have all boldness in Christ to command you that which is appropriate, ^{1:9} yet for love's sake I rather beg, ¹ being such a one as Paul, the aged, but also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. ^{1:10} I beg you for my child, whom I have become the father of in my chains, Onesimus, ^{1:11} who once was useless to you, but now is useful to you and to me. ^{1:12} I am sending him back. Therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, ^{1:13} whom I desired to keep with me, that on your behalf he might serve me in my chains for the Good News. ^{1:14} But I was willing to do nothing without your consent, that your goodness would not be as of necessity, but of free will. ^{1:15} For perhaps he was therefore separated from you for a while, that you would have him forever, ^{1:16} no longer as a slave, ² but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much rather to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

^{1:17} If then you count me a partner, receive him as you would receive me. ^{1:18} But if he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, put that to my account. ^{1:19} I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will

repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self besides). ^{1:20} Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in the Lord. ^{1:21} Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even beyond what I say.

^{1:22} Also, prepare a guest room for me, for I hope that through your prayers I will be restored to you. ³

1. *for love's sake I rather beg.* Paul appeals to love and cooperation instead of commanding. Inspiring others toward goodness of their own free will is the highest form of influence possible. Our best course is to show others that the Divine will is for one's highest good, and to try to inspire others to align their will with it.

2. *no longer as a slave, but ... a beloved brother.* Paul's appeal to Philemon for clemency towards Onesimus the slave is based on the Truth that in spite of certain limitations in the activity of the Word, it can, through the forgiving love of God, bring about freedom in some planes of consciousness.

3. *restored to you.* Paul asked Philemon to prepare to receive him, expecting Philemon's prayers to effect his release from prison.

Affirming a Change in Consciousness

^{1:23} Epaphras, ¹ my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, ^{1:24} as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ^{1:25} The grace ² of our Lord Jesus

Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

1. *Epaphras ... greets you.* Epaphras: the loving message of the Christ and its action in the Colossæ

and Rome states of mind. (MBD/Epaphras)
2. *grace*. Grace is a change in consciousness that lets go of the insistence of "even-exchanges" in life

all the time. Ed Rabel-Metaphysics 1, *The Divine Paradox, Law/Grace*

 Fillmore Study Bible annotations by Mary Salama.

World English Bible Footnotes:

[1] v1:10. Onesimus means "useful."

APPENDICES

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Nearly all the New Testament writings are available online. Print editions of individual books, like this one, are being released as they become available. The society's focus in 2023 is publishing a complete New Testament edition and the start of selected Old Testament books. The society welcomes new collaborators in this ongoing project.



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