

The Epistle To Philemon



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

STUDENT EDITION

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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.

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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?

- 2) **Where was he writing from?**

- 3) **Approximately when was this epistle written?**

- 4) **What other epistles were written by Paul about the same time?**

- 5) **What church possibly met in Philemon's home?**

- 6) **Who was Onesimus?**

- 7) **What was Paul's purpose in writing this epistle?**

- 8) **What are the key verses to this epistle?**

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

- 8) Define the terms "grace" and "peace" (3)
- 9) How could Paul have heard about Philemon? (4,5)
- 10) What good things had Paul heard concerning Philemon? (5)
- 11) What are some examples of Philemon's love for the saints?
- 12) What does Paul pray for in behalf of Philemon? (6)
- 13) How is this prayer related to the plea which follows in verses 8-21?
- 14) What had given Paul great joy and comfort in his imprisonment? (7)
- 15) How does Paul re-emphasize his close feelings for Philemon? (7)
- 16) What does the word "therefore" indicate? (8)
- 17) What could Paul have done in this matter? (8)
- 18) What does Paul do instead? (9)
- 19) Why does Paul call himself "the aged"? (9)
- 20) Why does he again refer to himself as a prisoner? (9)

- 21) In the original language, where does the name "Onesimus" appear in the sentence? (10)
- 22) What significance might there be in placing Onesimus' name at the end of the sentence?
- 23) What does Paul call Onesimus? What does it mean? (10)
- 24) What does the name "Onesimus" mean?
- 25) How had becoming a Christian changed Onesimus? (11)
- 26) What does Paul want Philemon to do in regard to Onesimus? (12)
- 27) How does Paul express further what Onesimus has meant to him? (12)
- 28) What had Paul wished to do with Onesimus? (13)
- 29) Why had Paul refrained from doing what he wished? (14)
- 30) What did Paul see as the "possible" reason for this turn of events? (15)
- 31) How did Paul want Philemon to receive Onesimus? (16)
- 32) Upon what basis does Paul ask Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul himself?
(17)
- 33) What is Paul willing to do in behalf of Onesimus? (18-19)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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