

# ***BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE FELLOWSHIP***

## **PHILEMON**



Philemon was a prominent Christian and probably a member of the church at Colosse. He was also the owner of a slave named Onesimus who had run away. Somehow, this fugitive slave had come into contact with Paul who was imprisoned in Rome. Through Paul, Onesimus became a Christian.

Paul's letter is an appeal to Philemon to be reconciled with his slave whom Paul is sending back. Paul encourages Philemon to welcome Onesimus not only as a forgiven slave but as a Christian brother. This letter, though short, is warm and masterful, reminding us that the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ drastically changes all our relationships.

1. (verse 1) Who wrote this letter? Paul  
What does he call himself? A Prisoner of Christ  
To whom is he writing? Philemon  
How does Paul describe him? A beloved brother and fellow-worker
2. According to verse 2, what is it that they have established in Philemon's house? A church  
Although we can be saved and become members of the Body of Christ apart from a church, it is clear that God desires believers to be united in fellowship with one another.
3. (verse 4), Paul says that he always mentions Philemon in his prayers and that he has heard of his love and faith that he has for the Lord Jesus and for all the saints (verse 5).
4. (verse 7) Paul tells Philemon he has great joy because the saints are refreshed by him.
5. (verse 9) For what "sake" or on what "basis" does Paul say he is writing? Love Paul claims to be a prisoner of whom? Christ Jesus The word "prisoner" carries an important message for Christians today. The definition of "prisoner" means *to be bound*, and in this case, it means to be bound to Jesus Christ.

6. (verse 10) Paul refers to Onesimus as his son. He is speaking of spiritual regeneration which the Holy Spirit brings about the moment a believer receives Jesus Christ. While in prison, God used Paul to lead Onesimus to Christ. As a result, Paul has a special bond with Onesimus like that of a father and son.
7. (verse 11) Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus was useless in the past but now is useful to you and to me.

In the Ancient World, Philemon had a legal right to punish or even kill a runaway slave. Onesimus wished to return to his master to correct his mistake, but may have been concerned about being punished for running away. Paul is careful not to force Philemon to do what is right. Instead, he guides Philemon into making the right choice for himself.

8. (verse 12) What action was Paul taking? He was sending Onesimus back to Philemon.
9. (verses 13-16) Paul would have preferred that Onesimus stay with him at Rome, but he did not want to keep him without Philemon's approval. Indirectly, Paul was asking Philemon to send Onesimus back to him. How would this benefit Philemon? Onesimus could serve Paul in Philemon's place.
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10. (verse 15) Paul says that "he was separated from you for a little while that you might have him back for good." What do you think Paul means? Philemon was now able to associate with Onesimus as a brother in Christ forever (a certain amount of latitude should be allowed for this answer)
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11. Write verse 16 in your own words. No longer as a slave either to you or to sin, but now a child of God, he is special to both of us even more so now both physically and spiritually (a certain amount of latitude should be allowed for this answer)
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12. (verse 17) How did Paul want Philemon to receive Onesimus? As if he were Paul himself
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13. (verse 18) How was anything that Onesimus owed Philemon to be repaid? It was to be charged to Paul's account.
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It is thought that perhaps Onesimus had stolen something from Philemon. One of the marks of true conversion is that a Christian is convicted by the Holy Spirit to right the wrongs of the past. Onesimus apparently owed Philemon a debt, but there was room for forgiveness even under those circumstances.

In this case, Onesimus' debt was to be "imputed" to Paul (charge it to me, put that on my account). This is quite similar to what Christ did for us on the cross. When he died, our sins were imputed to Him; they were reckoned to His account (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

14. Paul is of the opinion that Philemon owes him a debt; even so, he tells Philemon,  
What is the debt Philemon owes Paul? His very self  
Paul probably refers to the fact that he led Philemon to Christ as well.
15. (verse 20) Paul wants to have benefit and joy from Philemon in the Lord so he urges,  
"Refresh my heart in Christ."  
What do you think Paul really wants Philemon to do?  
Forgive Onesimus and return him to Paul so that he might serve him in the ministry
16. (verse 21) Why does Paul believe Philemon will do even more than he has asked of him (verse 21)?  
Paul has confidence in Philemon's faithfulness and friendship towards him
17. (verse 22) Was Paul hoping to visit Philemon? Yes  
How do you know? Paul asked for a room to be made ready
18. (verse 23) Who was Paul's fellow prisoner? Epaphras
19. (verse 23) Paul's fellow laborers were...  
Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke
20. (verse 25) Quote Paul's benediction. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit

Is there a Christian brother you have offended or has offended you? Take the matter before the Lord in prayer then go to the brother and make it right. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph 4:32)."

Is there any sin, anything you've done in your past for which you have not asked forgiveness. Is there some wrong you would like to make right? Take time now to pray and ask God for forgiveness. Also ask God to show you areas of sin in your life that you might not be aware of. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)."

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