

INTRODUCTION

1. Philemon is simply a brief account of a run away servant called Onesimus and his owner Philemon.
2. The letter is written by the Apostle Paul
 - a. and he intervenes trying to reconcile the relationship
 - b. of the former owner with the runaway.
3. For many of you, **reconciliation is painful**.
 - a. You start to get a picture in your head of something that you do not want to do,
 - b. but you are afraid that God is going to make you do it.
 - c. It might bring to mind the picture of restoring a relationship with someone who treated you unfairly.
 - d. Thinking of those things, and how it might scare you,
4. **Difference** between reconciliation and forgiveness
5. You are always **required to forgive**; it is **not** optional.
 - a. If you have been wronged you must forgive.
 - b. *"Forgive us as we forgive others."* – Lord's Prayer
 - c. The same measure **I use** to forgive,
 - i. **God will use** that measure to forgive me.
 - ii. That's kind of uncomfortable, isn't it?
6. Forgiveness also **doesn't take any action** at all by the other person.
 - a. Even if they stick their nose in the air and blow you off,
 - i. You are still required to forgive.
 - ii. You forgive **regardless** of what they do.
 - iii. Even if they never ask for forgiveness we forgive...
 1. we do not hold their actions against them any longer
 2. that is the basis of forgiveness.
7. But RECONCILIATION **isn't** that way.
 - a. For instance, if someone has **molested a child**,
 - b. you are required to forgive them,
 - i. but you are **not** required to let them
 - ii. baby-sit your children.
8. Or if someone has stolen money from your company,
 - a. you are **required** to forgive them,
 - b. but you are not required to put them in a position of treasurer,
 - c. or let them handle the cash and deposits.

9. Forgiveness or reconciliation does **not** give open doors
 - a. to those who have wronged you...
 - b. does **not** release them
 - i. from the consequences of their actions.
10. **If** Philemon was a letter about forgiveness, **it would be easy**.
 - a. Philemon you forgive Onesimus
 - b. it **doesn't** matter if he returns to you or not,
 - c. you forgive him.
11. But reconciliation doesn't work that way.
 - a. How do we know when restoration is necessary
 - b. and how far are we to go in this reconciliation process?
12. Let's see if Paul's letter to Philemon will help us sort that out.

PHILEMON

1. Philemon (meaning "beloved") has only one chapter;
2. it was written to Christian named: Philemon,
 - a. and we know very little about this person
3. The is from the Apostle Paul and Timothy (directly named in Philemon 1:1)
 - a. Timothy was a frequent traveler with the Apostle Paul
 - b. He was converted by Paul in Lystra during Paul's First Missionary Trip
 - c. Through Asia Minor
 - i. **Acts 16:1-3**
 - d. Their relationship became very close
 - e. Where Paul referred to Timothy as his son
4. It was really from the Apostle Paul
 - a. He later states in the letter
 - b. That he personally hand wrote the letter.

Philemon 19

"I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand."

5. The first thing Paul states in his letter addressed to Philemon
 - a. is that he is a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
 - b. But also, a prisoner of the Roman government,
 - c. Paul's chains were for the sake of the Gospel of Christ.
 - i. on account of professing him and preaching in his name

- ii. He was **not** a prisoner for any capital crime
- 6. Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - i. A standard greeting Paul uses in all his letters
 - ii. Common Jewish greeting and salutation
 - iii. “Shalom” – meaning “Peace”
- 7. Philemon, must have been living in the city of Colossae,
 - a. Colossae is located in modern-day southwestern Turkey.
 - b. Paul wrote this letter which was delivered by.
 - i. Onesimus and Tychicus
 - ii. And is mentioned in the letter to the Colossian Church

Colossians 4:7–9.

“Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.”

- c. He was a member of the Colossian church
- d. He must have been a fairly **affluent** Christian
 - i. he was wealthy enough to own slaves
 - ii. One of this slaves, this letter is concerning
 - iii. He must have had a decent sized house
 - iv. Because the church met in his own home.
 - 1. The New Testament churches met in homes,

Romans 16:5

“Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.”

1 Corinthians 16:19

“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.”

- 8. The second verse mentions, Apphia,
 - a. who was most likely Philemon's wife
 - b. And also a disciple – “**Our**” Sister
- 9. And Archippus
 - a. might have been his son

- b. and also, a disciple – “fellow soldier”
- c. he is also mentioned as a likely evangelist for the Colossian church

Colossians 4:17

“Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord.”

10. The letter was **written** in approximately AD 60—62,
 - a. during Paul's house arrest in Rome (**Acts 28:30–31**).
 - b. Based on information from
 - i. **Colossians**
 - ii. and **Philemon 1:22**

“And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.”
 - iii. this letter was probably written near the end of this arrest,
 - iv. closer to AD 62.
11. Philemon is the shortest of Paul's 13 letters.
 - a. One of 4 letters written from that Roman prison
12. The letter was concerning Onesimus (who was a Run-away slave)
 - a. Slavery was common in the Roman Empire
 - i. Estimates suggest that there were **60 million slaves** in the Roman Empire, men and women treated like pieces of merchandise to buy and sell.
 - ii. There were **laws** regulating run-away slaves at that time,
 - iii. If a slave ran away, he could be put to death when he was captured.
 - iv. The average slave sold for 500 denarii (one denarius was a day's wage for a typical laborer).
13. Onesimus was a run-away slave who fled Colossae, and traveled to Rome,
 - a. where he connected with Paul
 - b. and became a Christian in Rome
 - c. while Paul was in a Roman prison

Philemon 4–5

“I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.”

14. Paul's prayer life was substantial.
 - a. He must have constantly been praying
 - i. for thousands of people

- ii. all over the ancient world.

b. In prison, there isn't much else someone can do.

15. Philemon's reputation went beyond the borders of the local church

- a. The apostle was constantly hearing,
 - i. probably from Epaphras and Onesimus,
 - ii. and others
- b. of Philemon's generosity and hospitality
- c. **Even while Paul was in a Roman prison,**
 - i. Philemon's **reputation** was known
 - ii. Philemon **loved** the Brotherhood of Believers
 - iii. Great thing about being part of God's family
 - 1. You get to know people from all over the world
 - 2. I can go just about anywhere
 - 3. And I either know of someone in that congregation
 - 4. Or someone there has heard about me.
- d. WHAT A GREAT REPUTATION TO HAVE:
 - i. "Someone who genuinely loves the Brotherhood"

16. He praised Philemon for the way he had helped his fellow Christians.

- 1) *His love for all the saints* (i.e., **all Christians**)
- 2) was demonstrated by
 - 1. his willingness to share
 - 2. his blessings with others.

17. Paul continues his letter:

Philemon 6

"I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

18. Paul gives Philemon an opening admonition:

- a. Apparently, Philemon was
 - i. a timid disciple
 - ii. Or lost his conviction
 - 1. about sharing his faith
- b. The admonition **probably stemmed from** some:
 - i. Complaining or depression

- ii. Possibly from a loss of income due to
- iii. Some kind of unfortunate circumstances
 - 1. Impacting his life
- iv. Certainly, POSSIBLE that when Onesimus ran away
 - 1. He was part of a slavery insurrection where several slaves
 - 2. Organized an escape together
- c. **Whatever the reason,**
 - i. he needed to be reminded
 - ii. of the good things he has in Christ.

19. To achieve that, he needed to get back out there and share his faith.

- a. I've noticed over the years that when someone is down and depressed
- b. What they need to do is go out and share their faith.
- c. When sharing our faith, we inform people of how God has changed our lives
- d. And given our lives purpose and meaning.
- e. When we are reminded of these things, we gain faith and hope
- f. "IT'S LIKE RESURRECTING THE DEAD!"

20. Paul had great joy and consolation in the love of Philemon for other believers and him.

Philemon 7

"Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints."

- a. refreshed the saints' hearts through his words and work.
- b. This verse **seems to indicate** that
 - i. it was by some outstanding act of goodwill
 - ii. that Philemon had brought encouragement
 - iii. to the Christian community.
- c. This may have been
 - i. some unusual act of benevolence,
 - ii. probably in connection with a recent earthquake.
- d. However, it may have been
 - i. his usual acts of kindness,
 - ii. which he had shown to Christians.

21. PAUL IS PREPARING TO APPEAL TO THAT SAME LOVE.

Philemon 8

"Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do"

- a. Paul stated that his apostolic authority
- b. He could have resorted to his Christian authority as an apostle (vs 8)
- c. gave him the right to command Philemon
- d. to do what was right in the matter.
- e. Rather, **he chose not to** use that authority
- f. but rather appeal to Philemon's Christian character
- g. THAT OF LOVE

Philemon 9–10

“yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.”

Philemon 14

“But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced.”

22. He wanted Philemon's decision to be **voluntary** rather than out of **compulsion**

- a. Christ **doesn't** want anyone to follow him - who are forced to join.

23. That is why Jesus told the crowds following him

- a. that they must “***Count the Cost***” (Luke 14:28)
- b. before deciding to follow him.
- c. Jesus is **not** looking for
 - i. impulsive,
 - ii. coercive decisions
 - iii. to be his disciple.
 - iv. It must come from
 - 1. a willing desire to follow him.

24. Even when it comes to personal sacrifices

- a. like giving a contribution to the church,
- b. it must be “a willing sacrifice”
- c. **not** a guilt-ridden sacrifice.

2 Corinthians 9:6–7

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

25. The only “**musts**” are the **REQUIREMENTS** to be a disciple.

Luke 9:23

*“Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he **must** deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

- a. IT SHOULD BE NOTED HERE
 - i. that the decisions a Christian makes “willingly”
 - ii. if they are **not** aligned with
 - 1. the scriptures,
 - 2. good advice,
 - 3. and a clear conscience
 - iii. can have catastrophic consequences.
 - 1. And in fact, break our union with Jesus.

Hebrews 10:24–27

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

- a. Notice in this passage, the warning is suggestive,
 - i. “Let us consider”
 - ii. “Let us not”
 - iii. “If we deliberately”
 - iv. but the consequences of not meeting together is
 - 1) **not only** sinful,
 - 2) but can send us to **Hell**

26. Apostle Paul wanted **to protect** his brother Philemon’s faith

- a. by not creating a stumbling block
- b. Which could potentially cause
- c. Resentment
- d. Bitterness
- e. A break of unity
- f. And hurt the Christian community which Philemon refreshed the hearts of

27. **His appeal** is on the basis of

- a. Friendship
- b. Christian brotherhood
- c. Vs. 17 – partnership

- d. Freedom to chose

28. **Philemon 1:8–16** is Paul's plea to Philemon

- a. to forgive and reconcile with the runaway slave Onesimus.
- b. Paul reminds Philemon that the three of them,
 - i. including Onesimus, **are brothers**
 - ii. and should be treated the same way.
 - iii. Instead of Paul commanding,
 - 1) he preferred to rely on Philemon's sense of moral fitness,
 - 1. which had its basis in his faith in Christ
 - 2. and his love for the saints.
 - 3. He puts away command,
- c. he implores for the bond which unites all Christians.
- d. He is going to make his request to Onesimus on a threefold basis:
 - i. *"For love's sake."* This is the love of Paul and Philemon for each other as believers in Christ Jesus.
 - ii. *"Being such a one as Paul, the aged (v. 9)."*
 - 3. Paul was only in his sixties
 - 4. (that was a good age for men in that day),
 - 5. but he was an old man.
 - 6. He had suffered and was persecuted as a missionary for Christ, which had aged him.
 - a. *"a prisoner of Jesus Christ."*
 - 7. He could not come to Philemon
 - 8. because he was in a Roman prison.
 - iii. *"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains"*
 - 1. my son in the gospel,
 - 2. the relationship of a spiritual father;
- i. Timothy and Titus
- ii. **1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4**
- iii. He puts Onesimus in the same category as Timothy and Titus
- iv. The letter doesn't state why Onesimus was returning to Philemon
 - i. One strong reason that when a person repents to become a Christian,
 - 1. They must right any wrong they created or participated in

2. If he was a run-a-way slave as most historians believe, then returning to his master would be a definitive response of repentance.
 - a. Because of his conversion to Christianity,
3. he becomes aware that he had wronged his master
4. and decided to return and repair the damage
5. he had caused.
 - b. It's important to note: Paul isn't condoning or condemning slavery

1 Peter 2:18–21

“Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

- c. We don't know if Onesimus was
 6. A slave by ownership
 7. Or an indentured servant who has voluntarily surrendered his rights for a period of time to pay off a debt.
 - b. Reconciliation amongst Christians is PARAMOUNT
29. What we do know is that Onesimus was a valuable disciple
- a. and a very dear friend
 - b. of the Apostle Paul
 - c. So much so, that the Apostle Paul considered him to be his “son”
 - i. He describes Onesimus as a part of himself, as his "*VERY HEART*."
 - ii. Later in **vs. 16** Paul says, "*He is very dear to me.*"
30. Paul continues to appeal to Philemon
- a. His appeal has a caveat: "*no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother*"
 - i. Becoming a Christian requires that we look at people differently
 - ii. In Christianity there is no"
 - 1) Racism
 - 2) Class System (white collar/blue collar)
 - 3) Favoritism – Wealthy over Poor
 - 4) In Christ, all are equal

Galatians 3:26–28

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Philemon 17

“So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.”

Philemon 18

“If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.”

But if he has wronged you,”

- a. evidently refers to the time of Onesimus' escape."
- b. But if (you are not inclined to "receive" him' because) he has wronged you"; a milder term than "robbed you." Onesimus seems to have confessed some such act to Paul.
- c. Or owes anything, is similarly, in all probability, an allusion to some theft occurring simultaneously, but in a hypothetical form, and denoting an alleged fact.
- d. "put that on my account."
- e. The apostle may be saying something like, "I am ready to make good your loss if required."

31. Paul closes out this letter

- a. Anticipating a visit to Colossae
- b. Being released from the Roman Prison
- c. And plans to stay with Philemon
- d. To see the progress in Philemon's relationship with Onesimus

32. Paul mentions 5 of his fellow workers

Philemon 23–24

“Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.”

33.

34. Epaphras was an Evangelist

- a. Probably initiated the church in Colossae

Colossians 1:7–8

“You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.”

- b. Work as a minister in multiple cities

Colossians 4:12–13

“Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God,

mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.”

- c. Might have also been imprisoned with Paul
 - i. Paul witnessed him spending a lot of time in prayer
 - ii. He would have had lots of free time to pray in prison

35. He mentions **Mark** (also known as John Mark)

- a. The cousin to Barnabas
- b. Who accompanied Paul on his First Missionary Trip
- c. And later deserted on that trip through Asia Minor
- d. According to tradition, in A.D. 49, Mark traveled to Alexandria
 - i. and founded the Church of Alexandria
 - ii. today, the Coptic Orthodox Church,
 - iii. the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria,
 - iv. and the Coptic Catholic Church
 - v. trace their origins to this original community.
 - vi. Coptic tradition says that he was martyred in 68.
- e. FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION HAD TAKEN PLACE

36. **Aristarchus**

- a. Also a travelling companion with Paul during his First and Second Missionary Trip
- b. Also a fellow prisoner with Paul in the Roman prison

Colossians 4:10

“My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)”

- c. Not his first rodeo with trouble

Acts 19:29 – In Ephesus

“Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater.”

37. **Demas**

- a. Also, with Paul during his prison stay
- b. Well known to the Colossian church and to Philemon
- c. Later abandoned Paul which Paul warned the church about

2 Timothy 4:9–10

“Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.”

- d. No reason given other than he couldn't separate himself from this world
 - i. And its attractions
 - ii. It obviously hurt Paul deeply
 - iii. because he was looking for comfort from his son, Timothy

38. Luke

- a. First joined Paul in Troas (Act 16:10)
- b. Went with Paul everywhere
 - i. and the church members in Colossae knew him

Colossians 4:14

"Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings."

- c. With all the hardships Paul encountered,
 - i. He was constantly in need of a physician

2 Corinthians 11:23–25

"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea."

- ii. During Luke's travels, he acquired a biographical knowledge of Jesus
- iii. Subsequently wrote : the Gospel of Luke and Book of Acts

39. Paul concludes his letter with the salutation

Colossians 4:18

"I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."