

# **A Commentary on Philemon**

By Jerry Ingerman

[kym4us@gmail.com](mailto:kym4us@gmail.com)

[www.knowyourmessiah.com](http://www.knowyourmessiah.com)



## Introduction

Paul wrote the book of Philemon in Rome in approximately 64 AD. It is a personal letter from Paul to Philemon, a Christian brother living in Colossae. This letter was directed to Philemon in reference to a slave whom he owned named Onesimus who was with Paul in prison. Onesimus had run away from his master, ending up in Rome. Paul not only wrote in defense of Onesimus in this letter to Philemon, but he wrote for all slaveholders, as he knew there were many other Christian slaveholders. So this letter was also in response to and sets forth guidelines for all of them.

The book of Philemon takes place in Colossae, a great city in the region of Phygria, which itself was situated in Pamphyli (present day southern Turkey). 'Philemon' means 'affectionate'. He was a Christian master and a good man. Philemon was a son of Paul's in the faith. (Timothy and Titus are the other two.)

Philemon was a person of stature and wealth. Being a Christian, he knew of the ways of God. However, Onesimus told Paul that he feared death because that was the punishment for a slave that had run away from his master. So Paul wrote to Philemon, in Onesimus' behalf, a beautiful, personal writing, one showing great and compassionate love.

### Main characters and Places mentioned in Philemon

Pamphylia – “Pamphylia, in ancient geography, was the region in the south of Asia Minor, between Lycia and Cilicia, extending from the Mediterranean to Mount Taurus. It was bounded on the north by Pisidia and was therefore a country of small extent, having a coast-line of only about 75 miles with a breadth of about 30 miles.

After the defeat of Antiochus III in 190 BC they were included among the provinces annexed by the Romans to the dominions of Eumenes of Pergamum; but somewhat later they joined with the Pisidians and Cilicians in piratical ravages, and Side became the chief center and slave market of these freebooters. Pamphylia was for a short time included in the dominions of Amyntas, king of Galatia, but after his death lapsed into a district of a Roman province, and its name is not again mentioned in history.”

Phygria – “The Phrygians arrived in Anatolia in 1200 B.C., among the migrating tribes known as the "people of the Aegean Sea." At first they lived in Central Anatolia, building settlements over the ashes of cities of the Hittites such as Hattushash, Alacahöyük, Pazarli and Alisar. At the beginning of the eighth century B.C., they set up their capital at Gordion.”

Colossae – “Along a main inland road from Ephesus to the Euphrates River, Colossae shared the beauty of the Lycus Valley with its sister cities: Hierapolis (12 miles northwest) and Laodicea (12 miles west). The original roads from Ephesus and Sardis joined there, and this defensible and well-watered hill became a strategic point in antiquity. Declining in importance by the time of Paul’s Epistle to them, they had already been surpassed in size by the other Lycus Valley cities.”

An earthquake destroyed the once prospering town, in decline in Paul’s time, shortly after receiving the letter from Paul. It, along with neighboring Laodicea and Hierapolis, was rebuilt after the earthquake. The region near Colossae is very mountainous except for the Lycus Valley.

Onesimus – “a slave who, after robbing his master Philemon at Colossae, fled to Rome, where he was converted to Christianity by the apostle Paul, who sent him back to his master with the epistle which bears his name.” ‘Onesimus’ means 'profitable'.

Philemon – ‘friendly, loving’ - “an inhabitant of Colossae, and apparently a person of some note among the citizens (Colossians. 4:9, Philemon 2). ‘Philemon’ was a common name. He was brought to knowledge of the gospel through the instrumentality of Paul (19), and held a prominent place in the Christian community for his piety and beneficence (4-7). He is called in the epistle a "fellowlabourer," and therefore probably held some office in the church at Colossae; at all events, the title denotes that he took part in the work of spreading a knowledge of the gospel.” Philemon appears to have been a relatively wealthy Colossian who owned slaves, as did most of those of his economic class did in that day.

One of the chief features of life in the Roman Empire was slavery. It was a part of their culture. One place in the New Testament where slavery is an issue is in the Letter to Philemon. Some of the Christians in Phrygia were slave owners. Onesimus, a domestic slave of Philemon, had stolen from Philemon and ran away from him. After they meet in prison, Paul leads Onesimus to the Lord. Onesimus then ministers to Paul for a while. When Paul finds out that Onesimus is a runaway slave of Philemon's he writes a letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. The book of Philemon is this personal letter from Paul to Philemon regarding Onesimus. The letter states that Onesimus is now serving Paul.

*Philemon 13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:*

Paul asks Philemon to let Onesimus stay with Paul.

## Significant typology found in the book of Philemon

A definition of typology:

Typology - A type is a person, event or institution in the Old Testament, which prefigures some event, person, or institution in the New Testament relating to Christianity. It is a form of interpretation in which a person, event or object is seen as foreshadowing a later one. Basically a type is a representation by one thing of another.

\* Paul is a *type* of Jesus Christ in the book of Philemon -

Jesus Christ paid the price for us and took our sins and put them on His account. When you believe on him He takes *your* sins and puts them on *His* account.

*2Corinthians 5:21 For he hath made him [to be] sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

In the same way Paul asks that the sins of Onesimus be put on his (Paul's) account.

*Philemon 1:18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth [thee] ought, put that on mine account;*

This is called 'imputation', which means 'to set to the account of' another person. Furthermore, as Paul was Onesimus' friend, Jesus Christ is a friend of the Christian because He shows love through the sacrifice of Himself to freely pay for our sins. We came to Christ knowing what we have done and what we deserve. He says to the Father to put our sins on His (Christ's) account.

\* Philemon is a *type* of God the Father -

- Philemon's house acts as a church in which there are 'many mansions' for his family (Philemon 2). The Church itself is God's house. In His house there are also many mansions (John 14:2).

- Philemon was a good Christian who regularly refreshed the bowels of the saints. This is a perfect type of the refreshment God the Father supplies to the Christian (Philemon 7).

\* Onesimus is a *type* of the saved sinner. He is freed from the bonds he lived under by Paul. This is facilitated by Onesimus becoming a convert to Christianity, having received his conversion through the ministry of Paul. The lost person is similarly freed from bondage when his/her sins are imputed to Jesus Christ after becoming a Christian.

Slavery in the ancient world was vital to both the economy and even the social structure of Rome. It was one of the chief features of life in the Roman Empire. While it was common throughout the Mediterranean region and the Hellenistic regions in the east, it was not nearly as vital to others as it was to the dominance of Rome.

“Roman conquests of Carthage, Macedonia and Greece in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC altered what was once a luxury and privilege for the ruling elite into the predominant factor driving both social and economic policies for the Republic as a whole. The mass influx of slaves during this time period first was a sign of great wealth and power, but later destabilized an already fragile Roman class system.”

The Bible does not condemn slavery. God allowed it for a particular purpose, so it is godly. It's not an absolute sin. Anything can be perverted. A corrupt man will use his slaves corruptly. One must consider the issue in this light: If you don't take care of your slave the 'master' in heaven won't take care of you. When considering the book of Philemon one must get into the doctrine of slavery or owning slaves.

#### Kinds of slavery

- 1) political slavery - what the government restricts you from doing
- 2) spiritual slavery - to sin
- 3) religious slavery - to a man-made system
- 4) personal slavery – to an owner

Slavery is a Bible doctrine. Our society doesn't permit it, but God made provisions in the New Testament for people who own slaves. Slavery is a terrible thing, but so is everything else in this world. If there were slavery in our society it would be blasphemy for the slave to rebel against the master. The servant should always honor the master.

Slavery is because of sin. God condemns sin, but in condemning it he doesn't want to damn people permanently in the sense that they can't be saved. Although there are rules about slavery in the Bible, those rules exist to protect the slave. Since voluntary slavery was widely practiced during biblical times the Bible outlines laws to protect the lives and health of slaves. For example:

*Exodus 21:20 And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.*

In a spiritual sense God does not actually distinguish between free men and slaves. The New Testament states that all people are equal in the eyes of God - even slaves.

*Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

*Ephesians 6:8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether [he be] bond or free.*

*Colossians 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond [nor] free: but Christ [is] all, and in all.*

Paul's handling of Onesimus in the letter to Philemon does not suggest that Philemon had committed a sin in owning Onesimus. While Paul seems to request Onesimus' freedom because of his usefulness, there is no command against slavery.

The road that ran directly east from Ephesus passed through Magnesia and Tralles to Laodicea, and eleven miles farther up the valley of the River Lycus reached Colossae. Six miles north of Laodicea was Hierapolis. Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae were thus in close proximity to each other and thus were in constant communication. Christians were situated in all three.

The book of Philemon has 1 chapter and contains 25 verses. The main theme is found in verse 18:

*Philemon 1:18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth [thee] ought, put that on mine account;*

That is called imputation. It means 'to set to the account of' another person.'





## Verse by verse analysis of the book of Philemon

[[ Philemon 1 ]] Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy [our] brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer,  
'prisoner' -

Paul was a prisoner for Jesus Christ and a prisoner OF Jesus Christ. You should want to be a captive and bound prisoner of Christ. Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of Rome or of the religious leaders who started his legal troubles.

'fellowlabourer' - a companion in work, fellow worker The word 'fellow' involves other people. If you have a fellow labourer you are not labouring alone. Philemon, as well as Paul, was doing something for the Lord.

Doctrinal – Being purchased with a price by Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20), the Christian is, in a sense, owned by Him and can be regarded as His prisoner and in actuality is His property.

Practical - It is always more beneficial, when you have a task to perform, to have a fellow labourer help you with that work.

Historical – The Roman government imprisoned Paul for his activities.

[[ Philemon 2 ]] And to [our] beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:

This is the rest of Philemon's family, Apphia (his wife), Archippus is a fellowsoldier (instead of labourer) because Archippus (his son) was a fellow pastor (of a church in Collosae):

*Colossians 4:17 And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*

In the early stages of Christianity the church met in a home. The earliest Christians had no property of their own for church buildings. The Jews had their synagogues, but Christians met in the homes of their members. One such early church met in the house of Philemon. So the greeting is also to that church. Philemon doesn't seem to be the pastor, however. The church grows when the house has no more room. Paul sent Titus who appointed elders. Eventually this type of church can spawn new churches. In the customs of that day, Philemon's wife Apphia was the supervisor of the slaves in the household, so the letter concerned her also.

“The house church is the biblical church. All of the churches in the New Testament era were small assemblies that met in homes. While setting up institutional

forms of "church" may or may not provide a way to honor God, the movement toward the institution and the human authority that tends to accompany hierarchical institutional structure are not theologically neutral.”

Doctrinal – The New Testament house church is Biblical. In this verse a house functions as a church. Thus Christians can meet in a fellow Christian’s home and the gathering can be considered a church. The church is the people in the building not the building itself.

Practical – House churches are used even today. Christians should open their homes to care and lodging for preachers and missionaries as well.

Historical - The earliest Christians had no property of their own for church buildings thus homes met this purpose. Thus, the early New Testament church met in a series of houses.

[[ Philemon 3 ]] Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The grace and peace is from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul always talks about grace. ‘Philemon’ really is a personal note written by Paul to one man so ‘grace and peace’ here is more specifically directed to Philemon’s family as opposed to Christians in general.

Doctrinal – The peace a Christian can receive from God is a peace that goes beyond human understanding.

*Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

Practical – Having this peace in our lives can free us from worry and make us better servants for the Lord.

Historical – Our lack of grace and peace has resulted in turmoil and war throughout history.

[[ Philemon 4 ]] I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers,

He isn’t using vain repetition (like 'hail Mary' and the beads used to count them). A lot of things need to be prayed for more than once. The Bible instructs against vain repetition in prayer:

*Matthew 6:5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites [are]: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.*

*Matthew 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen [do]: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking*

Paul gives an example of prayer in Philippians –

*Philippians 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,*

*Philippians 1:4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,*

*Philippians 1:5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;*

*Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ:*

Doctrinal – Prayer is a direct line between God and the Christian.

Practical – In prayer you can ask God to carry your burdens, grant your requests.

Historical - Prayer has guided people's decisions and actions, thus affecting the course of secular events. Paul prayed regularly for a successful resolution of his situation with Onesimus.

[[ Philemon 5 ]] Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

Philemon's love for the Lord and for other people manifested itself enough that other people noticed it. Paul noticed Philemon's love for God AND for other saints. Today people in church act like hypocrites and there is no love there. Titus said that your works show your love. Invest time in others.

You have an impact on people by what you do. The simple things in Christianity are important. The greatest part of your life is application. The perfect balance is knowledge with the heart.

Doctrinal – A Christian's words and behavior is a visible testimony that is noticeable and can affect others (Example: Acts 26).

Practical – The way we behave can influence a lost person's decision whether or not to accept Jesus Christ.

Historical – People and nations have always reaped what they sowed from the good or bad 'seeds' of the testimony they have planted.

[[ Philemon 6 ]] That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

'effectual' –

For something to be effectual means that it produces an effect, it has the power or the force to produce the effect. Effectual works have an effect. The effectual working of your love comes from Jesus Christ and the power He has to work that thing out and make it evident through you is what makes it effectual (the effect desired).

'That the communication of thy faith may become effectual' - that it may have the power behind it to produce the effect.

Doctrinal – By sharing his faith the Christian produces an effect – in this case Paul awakened Philemon’s heart to the good things God has done for him (Philemon) with the aim of positively affecting Philemon’s treatment of Onesimus.

Practical – By showing others the good things God has done for you, others can be drawn to living a more Christian type of lifestyle – Christians, as well as the lost.

Historical – An individual or a nation’s ability to communicate what their politics, culture, etc. has determined who will ally with them.

[[ Philemon 7 ]] For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

'bowels of the saints are refreshed' - your bowels are your inward affection. Somebody ministered to you and your bowels are refreshed.

Paul wants Philemon to refresh him by taking care of Onesimus.

Doctrinal – Paul speaks of the great love that refreshed other Christians - in an inward manner. Practical – A Christian can refresh another Christian by helping to meet his/her needs using the love that Jesus Christ gave us.

Historical - Nations have always refreshed other nations, primarily in an outward way, but individual Christians have always ministered inwardly to other Christians, thereby refreshing them inwardly.

[[ Philemon 8 ]] Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

'enjoin' - to order or direct with urgency. He isn’t commanding. He is flattering Philemon, in a sense.

Doctrinal – A Christian can appeal to another Christian using the authority which comes from Christ.

Practical – When we order or instruct others the root cause should be to the betterment of a situation and we should act as ambassadors from a foreign land with the authority of that land's government (Christ).

Historical – A problem or dispute, whether between nations or individuals has always been best reconciled if Christian standards were the primary guideline of the negotiation. Paul appeals to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus using the authority which comes from Christ

[[ Philemon 9 ]] Yet for love's sake I rather beseech [thee], being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

God receives us for the sake of the love of His son.

Paul will ask a favor of Philemon. Before he asked, he appealed for love's sake instead of making a command. In Paul's wisdom he knew when to use the loving appeal. It was clear Paul would ask a favor of Philemon. Before he asked, he appealed to Philemon's sympathies by referring to himself as being also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. He does what he can to stir up the sympathy of Philemon.

Doctrinal – The Christian can appeal out of humbleness and love.

Practical – People are more sympathetic and reasonable if you appeal to them out of love and you present yourself in a more humble light.

Historical – Using wisdom and diplomacy and love for one another, nations can arrive at more equitable agreements and then a command (war) may be unnecessary. Paul appealed to Philemon as an aged prisoner to help him, out of love.

[[ Philemon 10 ]] I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

He hasn't told Philemon what he is beseeching him for yet. So now instead of commanding, he asks. Onesimus goes from Paul, telling him he belongs with Philemon, but with the letter to Philemon. Paul has also led Onesimus to the Lord. Again, the other two are Titus and Timothy.

When Paul makes this appeal on behalf of Onesimus, he did so with the customs and traditions of the Roman culture in mind. There was a Roman law which allowed a slave sanctuary if it was given at the altar. The altar could be in a private family home.

If so then the head of the family was obligated to give the slave protection while he tried to persuade him to return to his master. If the slave refused, the head of the family would put the slave up for auction and give the price for the slave to the former master. Paul gave Onesimus protection and now was working the issue out with Philemon.

“There were a number of Roman laws regarding slavery, and these too, changed over time. In the Republican period, as already suggested, slaves had no rights and were always subject to the whims of their owners. They did have some legal standing, however. They were allowed to act as witnesses in trials, and could gain freedom either through their owner's gratitude after loyal service or by buying it through the meager earnings they might collect over a lifetime of service. For example, owners in the Republic had the right to kill or mutilate slaves at a whim, but later imperial laws took this right away, though in practice this law could be largely ignored.”

Paul counts those he led to the Lord as his spiritual children. He leads Onesimus to the gospel.

Doctrinal – The Christian can ‘beget’ (in the sense of the new birth) sons through the gospel, all while being a prisoner of Christ.

Practical – Through our witnessing and our testimony we can cause the new birth to happen in those we witness to.

Historical - Paul led Onesimus to Christ, getting him out of bondage to sin and as his ‘son’ Paul was attempting to Onesimus get free of the bondage of slavery as well.

[[ Philemon 11 ]] Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

'Which in time past' - he WAS unprofitable but being saved makes a change in a man's life. He is now profitable to the Lord, Philemon and to Paul. Interestingly, as previously mentioned, the name Onesimus means ‘profitable’. Regarding the Christian: we were at one time unprofitable to God but you got saved and then became profitable to Him.

While Onesimus was now unprofitable to Philemon because of his escaping he became profitable to Paul. Since Philemon loved Paul and Onesimus was now helping Paul then indirectly Onesimus was helping Philemon at the same time.

Doctrinal – As long as people are lost they are unprofitable to God.

Practical – By leading a lost person to Christ the Christian can make that individual profitable to God.

Historical – Onesimus was unprofitable to God, but Paul led him to Christ, so he became profitable.

[[ Philemon 12 ]] Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

Paul is saying to 'receive Onesimus as you would receive me'. Philemon's runaway slave comes back with a letter from Paul, which not only says to receive him, but to receive him as he would receive Paul. Paul obviously wanted Philemon to deal gently with Onesimus. Under Roman law the slave owner had complete and total control over his slave. It wasn't unusual for slaves to be crucified for lesser offenses than escaping from his owner.

Being that the Roman Empire was so dependent on slavery, in spite of the fact that there were many slaves, it was felt that harsh punishment for a disobedient slave was necessary. The slave might actually get branded with a mark if he is fortunate. In the worst punishment he would be crucified.

Doctrinal – A slave was the property of his master; being a Christian didn't alter that status. So if you have something that belongs to another it should be returned.

Practical – A Christian's Biblical values should produce a reputation that 'speaks for itself.'

Historical – Paul acknowledged that Onesimus was the property of Philemon so all he could do is return him with the hopes that Philemon would deal gently with Onesimus.

[[ Philemon 13 ]] Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

'Whom I would have retained with me' - Paul shows the degree of profitability of Onesimus to him by saying that he (Paul) would have kept him if it were up to him to do so.

'ministered unto me' - Onesimus ministered to Paul in Philemon's place because Philemon couldn't be there. Paul knows Onesimus belongs to Philemon, so he beseeches Philemon for love's sake (verse 9).

Doctrinal – A Christian out in the battlefield armed with the gospel can be wounded in battle and need ministering from another Christian.

Practical – Christians today can profit from the support and encouragement of other Christians.

Historical – Paul found that Onesimus had become a help to him with his work.

[[ Philemon 14 ]] But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

He wants Philemon to make the decision regarding Onesimus although he believes Philemon will do what he asks. We need to live that way.

Paul is saying that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. Paul won't tell Philemon that he wants Onesimus released to him; he is going to let Philemon reap the blessing from him willingly, giving of himself, cheerfully giving Onesimus to the Lord. Paul didn't enjoin him, but gave Philemon the opportunity to give Onesimus to Paul for the ministry of Paul. The benefit is Philemon's reward for giving up Onesimus for the ministry.

Doctrinal – The Christian should willingly offer his/her services for the gospel's sake.

Practical – We can do Christ's work by volunteering our resources and time, not because it's a necessity.

Historical – Jesus attracted many disciples who would assist Him with His work.

[[ Philemon 15 ]] For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

*Genesis 45:5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

*Genesis 45:6 For these two years [hath] the famine [been] in the land: and yet [there are] five years, in the which [there shall] neither [be] earing nor harvest.*

*Genesis 45:7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.*

*Genesis 45:8 So now [it was] not you [that] sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.*

This is talking about Joseph being sold by his brothers and the reason for it.

Paul says in 'Philemon' that the reason Onesimus escaped was so he could be saved and become a brother. We look at purpose from a fleshy standpoint but Paul is saying Philemon departed for a season so the Lord could receive him forever.

Doctrinal – All that God does works for the greater good.



Practical – The trials, tribulations and chastisement the Christian receives are to conform him/her to God and to teach us.

Historical – Onesimus went through his trials so he would have the desire to escape his confinement and ultimately become a Christian.

[[ Philemon 16 ]] Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

*Matthew 23:8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, [even] Christ; and all ye are brethren.*

Paul is telling Philemon he is no longer just Onesimus' master but his brother. That works in the flesh and with God. Onesimus wasn't Paul's physical slave as the way he was to Philemon.

Doctrinal – Being a Christian makes secondary your former religion, family, and other things the world classifies you with. You now become a member of God's family.

Practical – You should put your Christian family first.

Historical – The flesh, although still sinful, could be utilized for the good of Christ if one chooses to walk in the spirit. The early Christians in areas like Antioch used the fruits of their rebirth to go out and spread the word.

[[ Philemon 17 ]] If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. 'receive him as myself.' - remember that he's been serving me in your place

Paul was making a powerful appeal because he stood beside a guilty man and said to the owner of the slave that the slave did deserve punishment. Yet, he stood besides him as a friend saying that he would take Onesimus' punishment (in type he was doing as Jesus Christ does). Jesus Christ does for us before *our* master, God the Father, saying that although we deserve to be punished He will take the punishment for us.

Doctrinal – Jesus Christ imputes His righteousness to us and takes the punishment for the sins we have committed against God.

Practical – Having a common partner in Christ we should receive each other as we received Him.

Historical – After Christ was resurrected the chance to receive the new birth became available by acceptance of Him as Saviour.

[[ Philemon 18 ]] If he hath wronged thee, or oweth [thee] ought, put that on mine account;

This is the whole theme of the book of Philemon - imputation. To impute something is to put it on someone else's account, set to the account of.

Specifically, this verse deals with imputation. In the same way God the Father imputes or accounts the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the new believer and his/her sins are imputed to Him. Similarly, whatever Onesimus stole from Philemon before he escaped is imputed to or placed on Paul's account. So as Christ did for us with God the Father Paul also does this for Onesimus with Philemon.

Doctrinal – Imputed righteousness is the Christian doctrine that a sinner being declared righteous by God is done so purely by God's grace and is totally unmerited.  
Practical - Today we can be declared righteous in God's eyes and become part of His body by accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour.  
Historical – The church (His body) started being formed in Acts 2.

[[ Philemon 19 ]] I Paul have written [it] with mine own hand, I will repay [it]: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

Some people believe Onesimus stole from Philemon. Paul said to put it on his account and to receive Onesimus not as a servant, but as a brother beloved.  
'mine own hand' – Paul suffered from an infirmity of his writing hand but he wanted his letter to be a personal treatment of Onesimus.

Doctrinal – Christ took on the responsibility of paying the debt for sin.  
Practical – We have the written word, the surest of promises that Christ will transfer our sin debt to Himself.  
Historical – This promise was in the gospel of the grace of God, which was revealed to Paul and is now being taken to the uttermost corners of the earth.

[[ Philemon 20 ]] Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.

Earlier (verse 7), Paul said that Philemon was a man who refreshed the heart of the saints. Now, he specifically told Philemon how he could refresh Paul's heart: by allowing Onesimus to stay with Paul.

Doctrinal – The inward man (the bowels are 'inward') can be refreshed through ministering.  
Practical – Christians can minister to each other instead of turning to the world for refreshment.  
Historical – Philemon's actions, if they were Christian in nature, could refresh Paul.

[[ Philemon 21 ]] Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

You can rejoice when you have confidence in someone.

Doctrinal – A Christian has served as a trustworthy fellowservant.

Practical – Christian standards should make any Christian someone you can have complete confidence in.

Historical – In the past many Christians went above and beyond what was expected of them as servants for Christ.

[[ Philemon 22 ]] But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

This showed the close relationship between Paul and Philemon.

Philemon 1:22 has been thought by some to be a ‘problem text’. It appears to contradict this verse:

*2Thessalonians 3:8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:*

Paul *did* accept food and lodging on brief visits to mature Christian friends in older, established churches as was the case in Philemon 22. But traveling guests were expected to pay after a free night or two. Evidence seems to indicate that Paul and his fellow travelers *did* support themselves on all three missionary journeys, receiving no financial help from any source. Paul was a tentmaker and earned money in that way.

*Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;*

*Acts 18:2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.*

*Acts 18:3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.*

*Acts 18:4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.*

*Acts 18:5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews [that] Jesus [was] Christ.*

Doctrinal – Christians can pray for each other and the requests of another can they can be forwarded to Christ, who then forwards them to the Father.

Practical – Paul believed that it would be through the prayers of Philemon that they would once again be together.

Historical - Paul believed that it would be through the prayers of Philemon that they would once again be together to be a help in the work Paul was doing.

[[ Philemon 23 ]] There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus;

At the time of Paul's imprisonment in Rome a Christian preacher named Epaphras was spreading the Gospel to his fellow Colossian citizens and Epaphras came to him with a favorable account of the Church at Colossae. He remained with Paul in Rome and was, in a sense, his "fellow prisoner". This is the only place in the New Testament where Philemon is mentioned by name. Philemon was doing something for the Lord.

Epaphras, knowing the danger of the false teaching in Colossae, prayed hard that the Colossian Christians would stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. -  
*Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is [one] of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

*Colossians 4:13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them [that are] in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.*

Doctrinal – Like-minded Christians can be considered ‘fellow prisoners’ of Christ.

Practical – In our battle against the world we could be arrested and jailed for what we stand for.

Historical – As a fellow prisoner of Christ Epaphras put himself in the position of a prisoner and may have actually been a fellowprisoner of Paul's at some time past.

[[ Philemon 24 ]] Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers.

Each of these names is also mentioned in the conclusion of the letter to the Colossians

*Colossians 4:10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)*

*Colossians 4:11 And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only [are my] fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.*

*Colossians 4:12 Epaphras, who is [one] of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

*Colossians 4:13 For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them [that are] in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.*

*Colossians 4:14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*

*Colossians 4:15 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.*

*Colossians 4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the [epistle] from Laodicea.*

*Colossians 4:17 And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.*

This confirms that the two letters went to the same place. Philemon lived in Colossae.

Doctrinal – Labourers had fellowlabourers in many Bible situations.

Practical – The Christian should not go on a witnessing assignment alone, but be accompanied by a fellow laborer. Fellowlabourers, if of a like mind, can assist each other. They should travel in pairs in the field.

Historical – These men traveled with Paul or were sent by him on his journeys.

[[ Philemon 25 ]] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with your spirit. Amen.

<<[Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.]>>

He is talking about your spirit, the new man.

That spirit will guide you into the things God has for you.

A city broken down and without walls has no protection. You don't have protection if you don't have control over your own spirit. That comes through Jesus Christ, not psychiatrists.

God gives you the understanding that you need.

Doctrinal – The spiritual man is addressed here. This spirit can and should get its guidance from Jesus Christ.

Practical – It was only after a Christian becomes totally submissive to God could God use him for His own purposes.

Historical – Those who walked in the Spirit and not after the flesh, Then God always granted them His protection.

## **Conclusions**

Important teachings in the book of Philemon include:

- the power of a Christian man's intercession
- the doctrine of imputation
- the advantages of being humble over being confrontational
- the responsibility of Christians to pray for each other
- the effect that living a godly life can have on others
- the duty of Christians to have a forgiving nature
- the importance of Christian fellowship
- the profitableness of individuals following their conversion
- the Christian's responsibility to obey their government when it doesn't contradict Scripture:

*Colossians 4:1 Masters, give unto [your] servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.*

- restoration:

*Philemon 1:18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth [thee] ought, put that on mine account;*

- early church history:

*Philemon 1:2 And to [our] beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:*

By finding Jesus Christ, Onesimus was elevated from being a lowly slave to being a brother in the body of Christ. While book of Philemon was a personal letter from Paul to Philemon regarding a slave named Onesimus, in the broader sense, even to this moment, Christ is still freeing the slaves of this world who accept Him, from their bondage and gives them the promise of an eternal blessed hope.

Paul not only wrote in defense of Onesimus in this letter to Philemon but he wrote on behalf of all slaveholders of that time and all slaves, the many lost people, of today. In the same way Onesimus was converted by Paul, it is the responsibility of the Christian today to free the lost person, a slave in bondage to this world, from his bonds.

Onesimus in his unsaved state was 'profitable' in name only and in reality was not profitable to Philemon. Now that he has been 'begotten' (Philemon 10) - born again he is now profitable. As a new creation Onesimus is finally and actually fulfilling his name through his acceptance of Christ. Onesimus, now a new creation in Christ, returns as a new creation in terms of his relationship with Philemon. He is no longer just a slave with an earthly debt to repay. He returns as a brother in Christ. He's now a true fulfillment of his name both physically and spiritually.

Through Onesimus finding Christ, he was raised in standing from that of a lowly slave to that of a brother in Christ. Christ is still freeing those who are slaves in bondage

to this world to the exalted stature of being heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

Paul, fulfilling his being a type of Jesus Christ, freed Onesimus from the bondage of slavery. Onesimus was returned to Philemon as more than a slave, but as a Christian brother in Christ. However, although Onesimus was now baptized into Christ, he could not simply shrug off his former obligations. Getting saved does not negate Onesimus' responsibility to serve Philemon. Even though Onesimus was saved, he was still Philemon's slave. He was still a slave and he still belonged to his earthly master. He needed to be reconciled to that fact, perhaps giving even better service than he had in the past.

*1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and [his] doctrine be not blasphemed.*

*1 Timothy 6:2 And they that have believing masters, let them not despise [them], because they are brethren; but rather do [them] service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.*

An important lesson that can be found in the book of Philemon is that God can change a life no matter how unprofitable the world considers that life to be. Onesimus was freed from his old life of bondage and this freedom came only through accepting Christ and having the right relationship with Him.

The Christian may be like Philemon and God is asking him to pardon someone who has done him wrong. In this way the focus can be on the positive characteristics of someone and you can see the potential in the relationship. One may be hurt or angry, thinking that is unfair just to pardon and forgive so easily, but perhaps God is speaking to our hearts to act as His Philemon today, to accept someone, whether it is a family member, a or a friend. God can enable us to work out this relationship.

The Christian may be like Onesimus - wondering away from his Master, Jesus Christ. He may be shameful of something he has done. But if Christ can forgive us, we have no right not to be able to forgive ourselves. The meaning of "Onesimus" is "useful". God can use us as individuals; God can use us to repair a broken relationship.

The Christian may be like Paul was in Philemon. God may want him to be willing to release someone so he can be used for God's work.



# Bibliography

Edgar J. Goodspeed, An Introduction to the New Testament, chapter 9 –The Letter To Philemon University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois September 1937.

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. The Letter to Philemon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. New York: Anchor Bible, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, December 5, 2000.

“Colossae”. Learn about Biblical sights,  
<[www.ctps.co.il/LBS%20pages/LBS\\_colossae.htm](http://www.ctps.co.il/LBS%20pages/LBS_colossae.htm)>

“Epaphras”. Wikipedia – The free encyclopedia Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.  
<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:>>

Witherington III, Ben. The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles. Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, November, 2007.

Estep, Dr. Greg. “Philemon”. Charity Baptist Bible Institute 1600 Brownleigh Rd. Dayton, Ohio 45429

Herodotus, “The Histories” (Edited by A. D. Godley)  
<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0126&loc=1.1.0&query=toc>>

Habershon, Ada R. Study of Types. Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1974.

“House Churches.” House Church Central <<http://www.hccentral.com/>>

Landon, Dale E. Professor Emeritus of History, Western Civilization to 1600 Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2000.

“The Letter of Paul to the Colossians” The Encyclopedia Britannica Inc Online edition, 2006 Britannica, Inc.

“Onesimus”. The Bible Encyclopedia © 2000-2006, Eden Communications.  
<[www.christiananswers.net/webdictionary/onesimus.html](http://www.christiananswers.net/webdictionary/onesimus.html) >

“Pamphylia”. Wikipedia – The free encyclopedia Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.  
<<http://www.1-free-software.com/en/wikipedia/p/pa/pamphylia.html>>

“Philemon”. The Bible Encyclopedia © 2000-2006, Eden Communications.  
<[www.christiananswers.net/webdictionary/philemon.html](http://www.christiananswers.net/webdictionary/philemon.html) >

Guzik, David. “Philemon - Paul’s Plea to a Friend, on Behalf of a Slave”  
Commentary on Philemon. 2006.  
<<http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/5701.htm>>

Thomas E. Miles, Sr. “The book of Philemon”, Biblical Topics  
<[http://dede.essortment.com/philemonbibleb\\_rigy.htm](http://dede.essortment.com/philemonbibleb_rigy.htm)>

“Roman slavery”, United Nations of Roma Victrix <[www.unrv.com/culture/roman-slavery.php](http://www.unrv.com/culture/roman-slavery.php)>