

# PHILEMON

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Lesson 1 w/Answers

Paul's Letter to Philemon

In this lesson we will take a brief look at a short, but powerful, book in the New Testament: Paul's letter to Philemon. It was written between 62 and 63 AD. Philemon, Timothy, and Titus were all contemporaries. It is likely that Philemon came to know Christ as his personal savior while Paul, Timothy, and Titus were all working together in Ephesus getting that church established; Paul also used this opportunity to train Titus. We believe that this is the most likely case; as Philemon was a wealthy man from the town of Colossae, a community close enough to Ephesus that he would have had many opportunities to visit this seaport town and hear Paul proclaim the Gospel. See Acts 19:10.

We can observe from Paul's letter to him that Philemon has a church in his home; and that Paul asks him to prepare a guest room for him. These facts, plus the fact that Onesimus was one of Philemon's slaves, indicates that Philemon was a wealthy man who owned property. He was also a man of influence in the community, as "head of a numerous household." We can infer as well from Paul's letter that Philemon was a man of exceptional character who "refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people."

From a quick study of Paul's letter, we can not only deduce a lot regarding Philemon and Onesimus, but we can also learn what it means to be a forgiving Christian.

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***Read Philemon—it's only a single chapter of 25 verses—and consider the following questions:***

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1. On what basis can we assume that Philemon and Onesimus were from Colossae? (See Colossians 4:9-17.)
  - a. ANSWER: Onesimus was a Colossian (Col 4:9), as was Archippus (Col 4:17). It is commonly believed that Apphia may have been Philemon's wife, and Archippus his son.
2. Paul was not alone in his work and ministry; he had many who worked with him. Who were they? (See Philemon verses 1-2 and verse 23.)
  - a. ANSWER: We can see from this letter that Paul had many workers who supported his ministry, including Timothy, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke.
3. Why is this letter included in the Bible? I personally believe that there are three reasons (and perhaps even more). Please note below what you believe these reasons to be. Consider Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew 18:21-22, and Galatians 3:26-29.
  - a. ANSWER 1: The letter teaches us about our responsibility to reach the lost and the fallen, as Paul had done with Onesimus. Furthermore, we see the importance of restoring relationships. So often, when one hurts another, the relationship is permanently broken. Here, Christ, through Paul, teaches us much about forgiveness.
  - b. ANSWER 2: The letter also shows us that Jesus and his Gospel reaches both the rich and the poor. Our status in the community has no bearing on our sin and our fallen state. We all need Jesus, and even the rich can come to know that Jesus is their Messiah.
  - c. ANSWER 3: Finally, the letter teaches us basic Bible based principles regarding our relationships with others, including those who serve us. This may sound strange today, but in reality, we are as responsible as Philemon was to treat those who serve us as Jesus taught. Consider your relationships with the people who clean your house, the hairdresser you use, your barber, the person who mows your lawn, does your dry cleaning, waits on you when you eat out, the folks who teach your children, people who work for you, and/or those whom you supervise at work. All of these individuals are to be treated with love and compassion as equal human beings. All people need to hear the Gospel, and all of them need to see Jesus in us—just as Philemon was seen within his community. We are not above any anyone else, nor are we special when compared to others. God sees us as all as being on the same level, i.e., fallen and in need of forgiveness.
4. What happened that caused Onesimus to run away? (See Phm. verse 18.)
  - a. ANSWER: Onesimus ran away to Rome, presumably after having stolen something from Philemon. In Rome, he became a believer under Paul's teaching. Then Paul, after hearing Onesimus' story, convinced him that he should return to his master Philemon; and, furthermore, to reconcile with him. These events prompted Paul's letter.

5. What does Paul tell Philemon in his letter, i.e., what does Paul request that Philemon do?
- a. ANSWER: Paul first urges Onesimus to do the right thing and go back to Philemon (Phm. verse 12). Then, when Onesimus agrees to go back and ask for forgiveness, Paul writes this very private letter to Philemon. In it, he asks Philemon to welcome back Onesimus as Philemon welcomes Paul; and he asks him to treat Onesimus as an equal in the kingdom of Christ—in essence to forgive him of his wrongdoing and restore him to the family.
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Again, from this short but pithy letter, we can glean much insight into Christian forgiveness. I pray that you will spend some time reflecting on this lesson and considering how it can help you grow in your walk with Jesus.

Thanks for your faithfulness in studying God's Holy Word.

In Christ,

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