

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Verse-By-Verse Study

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Greeting (v.1-3)

1^a Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

- Paul identified himself as a “*prisoner of Christ Jesus.*”
 - He was arrested in Jerusalem (**Acts 21**).
 - He was imprisoned in Caesarea for about two years (**Acts 23; 24:27**).
 - And he was imprisoned in Rome (**Acts 28**).
 - This appears to be the occasion when he penned this letter.
- Paul also acknowledged the presence of Timothy.
 - There is no reason to presume Timothy co-authored the letter since Paul specifically stated he wrote it “*with my own hand*” (**Phile. 19**).
 - Though we might view Timothy as a “big name” first century Christian and preacher, Paul did not elevate Timothy’s status beyond the position of “*brother.*”

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Greeting (v.1-3)

^{1b} To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, ² to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

- There were multiple recipients of this letter:
 - i. Philemon – a “*beloved friend and fellow laborer*” of both Paul and Timothy.
 - ii. Apphia – also described as “*beloved*.”
 - iii. Archippus – a “*fellow soldier*.”
 - We know basically nothing about the people named Apphia and Archippus.
 - Apphia is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament.
 - Archippus was a minister of the gospel (**Col. 4:17**).
 - Most scholars / commentators presume Apphia and Archippus were the wife and son of Philemon, respectively. However, this is purely speculation.
 - iv. The “*church in your [Philemon's] house*.”

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Greeting (v.1-3)

^{1b} To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, ² to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

- Much debate exists as to the meaning of “*the church in your house.*”
 - A similar expression is used in **Rom. 16:5**; **1 Cor. 16:19**; and **Col. 4:15**.

“It is generally thought that this refers to a local church that assembled in the house of the one specified . . . A possible meaning, and a very likely one, is that the word ‘church’ is used in the distributive sense (cf. Acts 8:3; Gal. 1:13) and includes other members of the church who made up the whole household of the one or ones specified, e.g. relatives, servants, et. al. (cf. Phil. 4:22)” (Marshall Patton, p.318-319).

- Personally, I see merit in both arguments.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Greeting (v.1-3)

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- This greeting is intentionally similar (**2 Thess. 3:16-18**) to the greeting Paul used in all of his epistles (**Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Gal 1:3; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Phile. 1:3**).
- “*Grace*” and “*peace*” are derived from both “*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.”
 - “*Grace*” – Good-will, loving-kindness, favor (Strong).
 - Jesus is how God delivers grace and truth to man today (**John 1:14, 17; Heb. 1:1**).
 - “*Peace*” – Tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is (Thayer).
 - True peace comes from being in God’s grace (**John 14:27, 16:33; Phil. 4:4-7; James 1:17**).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Thanksgiving & Prayer (v.4-7)

⁴ I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,

- Paul expressed thanks for his brother in Christ.
- It is notable that Paul was not simply grateful for Philemon; his thanksgiving prompted him to regularly pray for his beloved friend and fellow laborer.

“It would appear from this that Paul, in his private devotions, was in the habit of mentioning churches and individuals by name . . . Although encompassed with many cares and sorrows, and about to be put on trial for his life, he did not forget to remember a Christian brother though far distant from him, and to bear him on his heart before the throne of grace. To remember with affectionate concern these churches and individuals, as he did, Paul must have been a man of much prayer” (Albert Barnes, p.299).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Thanksgiving & Prayer (v.4-7)

⁴ I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,

- Paul frequently gave thanks for fellow members of the kingdom of Christ (**Col. 1:3, 9; Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2, 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:3**).
- Therefore, Christians today should follow Paul's example in regularly giving thanks and praying for fellow Christians (**2 Thess. 2:13**).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Thanksgiving & Prayer (v.4-7)

⁵ hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,

- Paul had been “*hearing*” of Philemon’s “*love and faith*” that had been manifested “*toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.*”
 - Paul likely heard this from Onesimus or Epaphras.
 - Epaphras provided updates on the Colossians’ welfare while he was with Paul in Rome (**Col. 1:7-8**).
 - Love for Jesus will prompt a person to love others (**1 John 4:20**).

“Although Paul’s comment here may appear as a stock expression to the casual reader, praising Philemon for his track record of faithfulness to Christ demonstrated in love for the saints is actually integral to the author’s argument in this short but pithy letter. Paul will soon ask Philemon to demonstrate this love toward Onesimus, his runaway slave” (NET Footnotes).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Thanksgiving & Prayer (v.4-7)

⁶ that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

- Philemon was in the practice of “*sharing*” his faith, i.e. his love and faithfulness was well-known.
 - This indicates that Philemon did not love merely in word but actively in deed via good works (**1 John 3:18; James 2:14-27; Matt. 5:16**).
- Paul prayed that his friend's dedication would continue.
 - Specifically, he wished Philemon would be effective in sharing his faith and in the “*acknowledgement of every good thing*” he did. In other words, keep on keeping on! (**Gal. 6:9**)

“The good which Philemon did, was matter of joy and comfort to him and others, who therefore desired that he would continue and abound in good fruits, more and more, to God's honour” (Matthew Henry, p.881).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

⁷ For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

- Paul and Timothy took “*great joy and consolation*” in Philemon’s love, knowing the good that was being accomplished as a direct result of that love – “*the hearts of the saints have been refreshed.*”

“‘To refresh the bowels’ is an expression used by Paul to mean, to give relief from distresses, or to aid the wretched in such a manner that, having their minds composed, and being free from all uneasiness and grief, they may find repose. ‘The bowels’ mean the affections, and [‘refresh’] denotes tranquility; and therefore they are greatly mistaken who torture this passage so as to make it refer to the belly and the nourishment of the body” (John Calvin, p.352).

- What a blessing it is to have people within the body of Christ who, because of their great love and kindness, constantly minister to the various needs of the saints.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

⁸ Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—

- Paul had apostolic authority to command Philemon to receive back his runaway slave. Such a command would have been “*fitting*” the situation and the Law of Christ. Yet, Paul did not exert that authority here.

“The apostle implies here that what he was about to ask was, was proper to be done in the circumstances, but he does not put it on that ground, but rather asks it as a personal favour. It is usually not best to command a thing to be done if we can as well secure it by asking it as a favor” (Albert Barnes, p.300).

- Instead of commanding Philemon to accept back Onesimus, Paul appealed to his friend on the basis of love (“*for love's sake*”).
 - Paul had already commended his brother for the love he had for all saints (**Phile. 5**). Now, that love would be put to the test.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

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- Paul had various rights as an apostle (1 Cor. 9:3-6), but he did not always assert these rights (1 Cor. 9:12, 15). In this situation, Paul could have used his authority (rights) to demand Philemon accept back Onesimus, but he didn't do that.

“Trouble has often come because some insist upon their right to do or say certain things, which may, indeed, be a lawful right. But, a Christian also has the right to give up his lawful right, and often does, in order to preserve peace and promote the welfare of others . . . In our dealings with one another in numerous matters, Christians need to exercise their Christian liberty to give up certain rights for the sake of love and peace. This is the thing Paul did in this text and was asking Philemon to do” (Herschell Patton, p.75).

- Many problems could be averted if we would be willing to forgo our own rights and liberties to maintain peace (1 Cor. 6:7, 8:9-13; Rom. 15:2-3).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

⁸ Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—

- Paul again described himself as a “*prisoner of Jesus Christ*,” and added that he was “*aged*.”
 - Paul's exact age at the time of writing is unknown, but we can determine a rough estimate.
 - Paul was a “*young man*” when he oversaw the murder of Stephen (**Acts 7:58**).
 - The Greek word translated as “*young man*” was used to describe men ages 24-40 years old (Thayer).
 - Based on the timeline of **Acts 1-9**, historians believe Paul was converted 1-2 years after the resurrection of Christ.
 - The letter to Philemon was likely written approximately 62 AD.
 - Therefore, Paul was likely somewhere between 55-65 years old at the time of writing the letter to Philemon.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

⁸ Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, ⁹ yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—

- Paul again described himself as a “*prisoner of Jesus Christ*,” and added that he was “*aged*.”
“It will accord well with the usual meaning of the words to suppose that Paul was in the neighborhood of thirty when he was converted, and that he was now not far from sixty. We are to remember, also, that the constitution of Paul may have been much broken by his labours, his perils, and his trials” (Albert Barnes, p.301).
- On an initial reading, such information may seem non-essential, but the probable reason that Paul reiterated his imprisonment and mentioned his age was to motivate his friend to accept his appeal.
 - Put yourself in Philemon's shoes – would you not be motivated to grant Paul's request knowing everything he endured was continuing to endure, even into his old age?

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

*¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,
¹¹ who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.*

- Like Timothy, Onesimus was a “son” in the faith to Paul (**1 Tim. 1:2; 1 Cor. 4:15**).
 - Onesimus was “*begotten*,” or born again (**John 3:3-5**), during Paul’s imprisonment.
- Onesimus’s conversion demonstrates how the gospel message renders social statuses irrelevant, with all people, regardless of their background or social standing, able to become equal recipients of God's grace and forgiveness (**Acts 10:34-35; Tit. 2:11-14**).
 - Christ died for the poor and “*unprofitable*” slave just the same as He died for the slave-owner. Neither were worthy of that sacrifice, but both could equally receive the blessings of it.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

*¹⁰ I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,
¹¹ who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.*

- Evidently, Philemon once viewed Onesimus as “*unprofitable*,” or “*useless*” (ESV, NASB, RSV, NIV, etc.). There are numerous possibilities as to why:
 - Philemon may have viewed Onesimus as merely a slave and nothing more.
 - Onesimus may not have been diligent in his service.
 - Onesimus was “*unprofitable*” for Philemon due to running away.
 - Whatever the case, Onesimus was greatly valuable to Paul upon his conversion, and Paul wished for Philemon to see the same value in his new brother in Christ.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹² I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.

- Paul considered Onesimus as his “own heart.” Yet, as much as he loved Onesimus and wished for him to remain in Rome, Paul recognized that Onesimus needed to right his wrong and return to his earthly master.

“Onesimus was so precious to Paul, it was like tearing his heart out to return him. Paul would rather have kept him so that Onesimus could continue to minister to his own needs. But without the reconciliation with Philemon and his approval, Paul would not keep Onesimus” (Robert Harkrider, p.150).

- Given his situation, Paul could use all the help anyone would offer. Yet, Paul did not put his own needs above the need for Onesimus to reconcile with his master (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

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Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹² I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.

- The text does not imply that Onesimus was forced against his will to return to his master (**see also Phil. 2:25 and Col. 4:7-8**).

“In his unconverted state he had . . . withdrawn himself, to his master's injury; but, now that he had seen his sin and repented, he was willing and desirous to return to his duty, and Paul would not hinder this, but rather further it” (Matthew Henry, p.883).

- Onesimus voluntarily returned to Colossae to reconcile with Philemon because he recognized the need to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance (**Matt. 3:8**) over a matter which he had not yet corrected.

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¹² I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, ¹³ whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel.

- The fact that Onesimus needed to right a wrong that occurred prior to his conversion is an important lesson all potential converts must understand.
 - Baptism for forgiveness of sins **does not** negate the need for bringing fruits of repentance for our past wrongs (**Acts 2:38**).
 - To some Christians, baptism has become so important that it somehow overrides the need for repentance in spite of what **Acts 2:38** actually teaches.
 - Examine **1 Cor. 6:9-11**, then ask yourself what difference does it make if an idolater, adulterer, or homosexual is baptized unless he corrects his sinful life?
 - Baptism did not change the fact that Onesimus was a slave who violated **Col. 3:22** when he ran away from his master; only his repentance could change that (**Eph. 4:20-24**).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹⁴ But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

Perspective #1:

- Paul desired for Onesimus to remain with him, but he would not encourage Onesimus to stay without Philemon's "*consent*." Onesimus needed his master's "*voluntary*" approval.
 - However, Paul never made any such request because reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus was far more important than his own wishes.
- Many commentators have suggested that once Philemon read this letter and recognized that Paul wished Onesimus could have stayed in Rome, it is possible that Philemon would, after reconciling, free Onesimus to return to Paul.
 - While there is some merit to this speculation, I find it unlikely that Philemon would send Onesimus back to Paul since the latter planned to return to Colossae (**Phile. 22**).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹⁴ But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

Perspective #2:

- Although Paul wished for Philemon to openly receive Onesimus, he would not force Philemon to accept him. Philemon needed to voluntarily take back Onesimus rather than do so “*by compulsion*.”
 - A form of the Greek word translated “*compulsion*” also appears in **2 Cor. 9:7**.
 - If Philemon received Onesimus, he would be performing a “good deed.” However, compulsory good deeds that lack earnest willfulness and are performed solely because “it’s the right thing to do” are spiritually unproductive.
 - This principle further proves Onesimus willingly, not by “*compulsion*,” returned to his master.

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Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

15a For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose,

- Initially, Onesimus's escape would have been greatly damaging to Philemon, but much eternal good occurred in the end.
 - This passage in no way serves to justify "situation ethics."
 - It is wrong to violate God's laws to accomplish a perceived "*good*" (**1 Sam. 15**).
 - We should never think "*let us do evil that good may come*" (**Rom. 3:8**).
- Instead, the implication seems to be that God's providence was at work in accomplishing good in what was initially a disastrous circumstance.

"What appeared to Philemon, therefore, to be a calamity, and what seemed to him to be wrong on the part of Onesimus, might have been permitted to occur in order that he might receive a higher benefit" (Albert Barnes, p.304).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

^{15b} that you might receive him forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

- “*Receive him*” carries a dual meaning.
 - Philemon accepting back Onesimus as a slave.
 - Philemon receiving Onesimus as a “*beloved brother*” in the Lord.
 - Unlike the relationship of slave and slave-master, the relationship of brothers in Christ would extend “*forever*” through eternity.
 - Onesimus should be even more “*beloved*” because of the relationship they shared not just in the flesh (slave/slave-master), but now in the Lord (brothers).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹⁷ If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.

- Ultimately, Philemon needed to decide whether or not he would “*receive*” Onesimus; Paul would not force Philemon to accept back his runaway slave.
 - “*If*” Philemon considered Paul a “*partner*” in God’s kingdom, then Philemon should accept Onesimus just as he would accept Paul because all three were equal partners in the kingdom and should be received just the same (**Gal. 3:28**).
 - The Greek word for “*partner*” can be translated as “*companion*” (**Heb. 10:33**) or “*partaker*” (**2 Pet. 1:4**).
- This would be a test of Philemon’s love, which the apostle praised earlier (**Phile. 5**), and would demonstrate how Godly love “*covers a multitude of sins*” (**1 Pet. 4:8**).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹⁸ But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

- Due to Paul saying “*if he has wronged you or owes you anything*,” most commentators and scholars conclude that Onesimus robbed or defrauded Philemon.

“If Onesimus had, at the time of his flight, appropriated funds or property belonging to his master, and it is not altogether clear how he could have made his way from his home in or near Colossae to Rome – a journey of probably a thousand miles – without any funds at all, or even by the help of any peculium which he might have acquired . . . As a slave, he could not, indeed, in strict law, owe anything to his master, as the master could not owe anything (even the peculium) to his slave . . . But he might, of course, steal from him, and then would be liable for the theft” (The Pulpit Commentary Volume 21, p.iv-v).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹⁸ But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

- While it is plausible that Onesimus robbed / defrauded his master before fleeing, Paul's language does not demand that such an inference is necessary.
“Some think that our text implies theft on the part of Onesimus, perhaps, to aid himself in his flight to Rome. However, I see no proof of such. I rather think the doubt in Paul's mind, expressed by the ‘if’ in his statement, had to do with Philemon's own state of mind which Paul did not fully know” (Marshall Patton, p.325).
- Paul did not say that Onesimus had, indeed, robbed or defrauded Philemon; he simply stated that “*if*” there were any debts owed by Onesimus that he would personally account for it by making good on any potential debts or damages.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

¹⁸ But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

- “*My Account*” – to reckon in, set to one's account, lay to one's charge, **impute** (Thayer).
- This Greek word is the same term that is translated “*imputed*” in **Rom. 5:13**.
- Any potential debts of Onesimus that were imputed to Paul did not make the latter guilty of any wrongdoing that the former may have committed. Paul simply bore any potential consequences (voluntarily so) without the guilt.
 - This helps us better understand the substitutionary death of Christ and imputation of sin.

“In this case, it would have been manifestly unjust for Philemon to charge the wrong which Onesimus had done, or what he owed him, to the apostle Paul without his consent; and it cannot be inferred from what Paul says here that it would have been right to do so. The steps in the case were these: (1) Onesimus, not Paul, had done the wrong. (2) Paul was not guilty of it, or blameworthy for it, and never in any way, or by any process, could be made to be, or conceived to be. It would be true forever that Onesimus and not he had done the wrong. (3) Paul assumed the debt and the wrong to himself. He was willing, by putting himself in the place of Onesimus, to bear the consequences, and to have Onesimus treated as if he had not done it. When he had voluntarily assumed it, it was right to treat him as if he had done so; that is, to hold him responsible. A man may assume a debt if he pleases, and then he may be held answerable for it . . . The same principle prevails in imputation everywhere. (a) What we have done is chargeable upon us. (b) If we have not done a thing, or have not assumed it by a voluntary act, it is not right to charge it upon us. (c) God reckons things as they are . . .” (Albert Barnes, p.308).

“ . . . The Saviour voluntarily assumed the place of man, and God reckoned, or considered it so. He did not hold him guilty or blameworthy in the case; but as he had voluntarily taken the place of the sinner, he was treated as if he had been a sinner. God, in like manner, does not charge on man crimes of which he is not guilty. He does not hold him to be blameworthy, or ill-deserving for the sin of Adam, or any other sin but his own. He reckons things as they are . . . He never reckons those to be guilty who are not guilty; or those to be ill-deserving who are not ill-deserving; nor does he punish one for what another has done. When Paul, therefore, voluntarily assumed a debt or an obligation, what he did should not be urged as an argument to prove that it would be right for God to charge on all the posterity of Adam the sin of their first father, or to hold them guilty for an offence committed ages before they had an existence. The case should be adduced to demonstrate one point only - that when a man assumes a debt, or voluntarily takes a wrong done upon himself, it is right to hold him responsible for it” (Albert Barnes, p.308).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

19a I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—

- Paul stated that he wrote the letter by his “*own hand*.” This statement likely served a twofold purpose:
 - First, it indicated that Paul personally penned the letter.
 - Second, it served as assurance that Paul would do what he just stated in the prior verse; that is, pay back any debts incurred by Onesimus against Philemon.
 - A man of Paul's character did not need to use phrases like “I promise,” “You can trust me,” “I'm not lying,” etc. (**Matt. 5:33-37**).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

^{19b} not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.

- Paul provided an additional motivating factor for Philemon to accept the aged apostle's request: *"You owe me even your own self besides."*
 - This likely means Paul was responsible for Philemon's conversion.

“‘You owe me your very self’ means that Paul was responsible for some sort of blessing in the life of Philemon; though a monetary idea may be in mind, it is perhaps better to understand Paul as referring to the spiritual truth (i.e., the gospel) he had taught Philemon” (NET Footnotes).
- Considering Philemon likely owed his soul's salvation to Paul, how could he reject the apostle's humble request to accept back Onesimus?

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

²⁰ Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

- Philemon had already been refreshing the hearts of other saints (**Phile. 7**).
- If Philemon accepted Paul's request to openly receive Onesimus back, then he would also "*refresh*" Paul's heart and, thus, bring joy to his aged friend and brother.
- Not only would Paul have "*joy*," but the Lord Himself would also be pleased (**Matt. 18:21-35**).

"Paul's use of the expression 'in the Lord' reminded Philemon . . . that granting this request reaches beyond fulfilling Paul's personal joy. It is commensurate with the demands of the gospel of Christ itself . . . Therefore, both Paul and the Lord rejoice" (Marshall Patton, p.326).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Plea for Onesimus (v.8-21)

²¹ Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

- Paul had zero doubt that Philemon would comply with his request.
 - He had great “*confidence*” in Philemon’s “*obedience*” to this request.
 - He was sure Philemon would do “*even more*” than requested.
 - Many argue that this implies Philemon would release Onesimus from slavery.
“Do more than I say’ . . . can hardly refer to anything except the manumission of Onesimus, and possibly his being sent back again to St. Paul” (Ellicott).
- While it is plausible that Philemon released Onesimus from his slavery, we cannot know assuredly.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Final Remarks (v.22-25)

²² But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

- Paul planned to visit Philemon and requested prayers from the recipients of the letter (“you” is plural in the Greek) that this visit would be possible. However, we do not know if such a trip ever occurred.

“That Paul ever returned to Colossae is uncertain. Tradition says he was released in 63 A.D. soon after he wrote these letters. During approximately four years of freedom he visited churches in Macedonia, Asia, and Spain before he was arrested again and returned to Rome where he was beheaded in 68 A.D. Whether or not he visited Philemon . . . he desired to do so” (Robert Harkrider, p.151).

- Given Philemon's hospitality and love for all the saints, we can only assume that Philemon would have welcomed his aged friend into his home with open arms if Paul ever made the trip.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Final Remarks (v.22-25)

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

- Epaphras is mentioned here.
 - He is described as Paul's "*fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.*" Elsewhere, Paul described Epaphras as a "*bondservant of Christ*" (**Col. 4:12**).
 - Epaphras taught the Colossians (**Col. 1:7**) and brought reports to Paul on their condition (**Col. 1:7-9**).
 - Therefore, it is very possible that Epaphras had a close relationship with Philemon.

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Paul's Final Remarks (v.22-25)

²⁴ *as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.*

- Several other people are described as Paul's "*fellow laborers*."
 - Aristarchus
 - In **Col. 4:10**, Paul described Aristarchus as his "*fellow prisoner*."
 - He was with Paul during the riot in Ephesus (**Acts 19:29**) and he also traveled with Paul throughout Greece (**Acts 20:4**).
 - Mark
 - Likely the writer of the Gospel of Mark and most likely the same John Mark who worked closely with Paul until leaving for unknown reasons (**Acts 13:2-13**).
 - Positive references to Mark here and in **Col. 4:10** and **2 Tim. 4:11** show how valuable Mark became to Paul.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Final Remarks (v.22-25)

²⁴ as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.

- Several other people are described as Paul's "*fellow laborers*."
 - Aristarchus
 - Mark
 - Demas
 - We know little about Demas. We do know he later forsook Paul (**2 Tim. 4:10**).
 - Luke
 - Assuredly the same man who penned both the Gospel of Luke and Acts.
 - Luke traveled with Paul during his second and third missionary journeys (**Acts 16:10-12, 20:5-6, 21:18, 27:1**).
 - Unlike Demas and so many others, Luke was a loyal supporter of Paul, having stood by him never to forsake him (**2 Tim. 4:11**).

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul's Final Remarks (v.22-25)

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

- As was his custom (**2 Thess. 3:17-18**), Paul signed off the letter with a version of his signature “*grace be with you*” salutation.
 - Paul regularly ended his letters by wishing that the unmerited favor of “*our Lord Jesus Christ*” would be upon the people he addressed (**1 Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess 3:18; 2 Tim. 4:22**).
- It is only fitting that such a kind and loving statement would end such a graceful and loving letter.