

Philemon **Extraordinary plea for an Extraordinary act of Love**

Letter from prison to a beloved friend and fellow worker in the Lord

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

To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, ² to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise for the person and reputation of Philemon

⁴ I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, ⁵ hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints, ⁶ that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. ⁷ For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

Plea for Onesimus a beloved son in the faith – once slave, now brother

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-- 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. 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. ¹⁴ But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary. ¹⁵ For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, 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.

Accountability for account of wrong between brethren

¹⁷ If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me. ¹⁸ But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay--not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. ²⁰ Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. ²¹ Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Desire to come personally

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

Closing greetings and blessing

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, ²⁴ as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers. ²⁵ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.
NKJV

Facts Revealed:

Letter from prison to a beloved friend and fellow worker in the Lord [Philemon 1:1-3]

✚ Paul was in prison for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

✧ Timothy was with Paul as the letter was written by Paul's own hand.

- ✧ The fact that Paul addressed the letter to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, indicates that Philemon knew both Paul and Timothy with a bond of Christian love that originated when Philemon was converted to the faith by Paul's ministry.
- ✧ Philemon had established a Church in his own house, with Apphia and Archippus as co-workers in the church being included in the address of the very open but personal message to Philemon.
- ✧ Paul's inclusion of the church in Philemon's house as recipients of this letter indicates that Paul saw in the content of the letter an example for other believers as well as Philemon.
- ✧ Counsel to the leader thus becomes counsel to the church and is excellent guidance for future similar occasions.

Greeting and blessing [\[Philemon 1:3\]](#)

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

Praise for the person and reputation of Philemon [\[Philemon 1:4-7\]](#)

- ✠ Paul remembers all of his converts in his prayers with thanksgiving and praise.
 - ✧ Paul's praise is not based only on his personal observation of the life style of Philemon, but Philemon's reputation has spread in Christian circles as far as the prison where Paul is held, confirming his love, and faith toward the Lord Jesus as demonstrated by his expression of love toward all the Saints.
 - ✧ Paul's prayer is that the sharing of your faith may become effective through the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.
 - ✧ Christ Jesus is the source of all the good things that make up the good works of believers.
 - ✧ Paul and company have great joy and comfort, seeing the love of Philemon expressed in his support that has refreshed the Saints who have been helped by him.

Plea for Onesimus a beloved son in the faith – once slave, now brother [\[Philemon 1:8-16\]](#)

- ✠ After acknowledging Philemon's past good works in the Lord, Paul comes to the issue at hand, the relationship of a runaway slave who has become a believer and great helper toward Paul, and a brother believer who lost the services of his slave.
 - ✧ This is a very unusual move on the part of Paul who is well versed in the Laws of God, but it becomes a relationship issue in the Church between believers.
 - ✧ The Law requires that instead of returning the slave to his master, the one to whom the slave escapes is to help the slave.

"You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him." [\[Deuteronomy 23:15-16 NKJV\]](#)
 - ✧ Paul acknowledged that it is a bold move, but rather than make it as a command he makes it as an appeal for the sake of love.
 - ✧ In his appeal to Philemon, Paul uses all the pressure he has available to influence the desired response.
 - ✧ Paul the aged, and now a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
 - ✧ Onesimus was a slave who escaped from Philemon in Colossae and found his way to Rome where some way he came into the influence of Paul a prisoner there who shared the Gospel message and convinced Onesimus of its truth. Upon believing the Gospel message, Onesimus became a valued worker with Paul and was sent with Tychicus to carry the letter to the Colossians. Paul called him a faithful and beloved brother who is one of you. [\[Colossians 4:7-9\]](#)
 - ✧ It is possible that Onesimus may have carried both letters at the same time because both were sent to Colossae by Paul and carried by the same people.

- ✧ In the letter to the Colossians, Paul also mentioned the relationship of a master toward his servant, and called the master to do what is right. [\[Colossians 4:1\]](#)
- ✧ Paul appealed for Onesimus whom he calls "my son whom I have begotten while in my chains, who was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me."
- ✧ Paul identifies Onesimus as his own heart, whom he wished to keep with himself that Onesimus might minister to Paul in his chains for the Gospel on behalf of Philemon.
- ✧ Now Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon very publicly with instructions for Philemon to receive him as a brother in the Lord and not as a slave.
- ✧ Paul is making a public opportunity for Philemon to demonstrate his Christian love by this good deed of voluntarily receiving Onesimus as a brother, and not by compulsion, it could be for this reason Onesimus had runaway.
- ✧ This request is extremely significant to Paul, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Accountability for account of wrong between brethren [\[Philemon 1:17-21\]](#)

- ✧ To intensify the pressure, Paul asked Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul if he counts Paul as his partner.
- ✧ Paul takes responsibility for any wrong Philemon feels regarding Onesimus, and asks Philemon to charge it to Paul's account with the assurance that Paul will repay the loss, and with the evidence that it was written by Paul's own hand.
- ✧ Then Paul reminded Philemon that he owes Paul his very self, because it was through Paul that Philemon found salvation and became a believer.
- ✧ Paul said, "Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say."
- ✧ With this approach made so publicly, it would be very difficult for Philemon as a leader in the Colossian Church to do otherwise with his own reputation on the line.

Desire to come personally [\[Philemon 1:22\]](#)

- ✧ Though Paul is a prisoner, he expresses hope that he might soon be released and be able to come to Colossae himself, so he asks Philemon to prepare a guest room for him.
- ✧ This would provide the prospect that Paul himself might come and verify whether Philemon had done as Paul requested, adding even more pressure.

Closing greetings and blessing [\[Philemon 1:23-25\]](#)

- ✧ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.
- ✧ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen