

Greetings to Philemon and the Household.

This letter begins with Paul greeting Philemon, 2 others and the church that is under the care of Philemon in his house. Paul also includes Timothy, but Timothy did not help Paul with this letter as he did with others. This is a personal letter to Philemon; a request and Timothy is only included because he is Paul's permanent partner in his ministry, and they would have known him very well.

Read Philemon 1:1-7

- Vs.1 – Paul is stating he is a prisoner just as he did in the Epistle to the Colossians. In Rome under house arrest.
 - Vs.2 – To Philemon first. Philemon was residing in Colossians (Col. 4:9) and Paul recognizes him above the others in Colossians because he calls him out as a “fellow worker.” Paul does not do this in any of his letters to any of the other churches in the [Lycus Valley](#). Philemon is special to Paul.
 - Apphia -It is presumed to be part of Philemon's household. She might have been Philemon's wife. "The name Apphia is well attested in Phrygia and elsewhere in Western Anatolia: one Apphia of Colossae is commemorated on a tombstone set up by her husband Hermas"
- [The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians](#)
[\(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)](#) pg. 206.

- Archippus who might have been Philemon's son. Paul calls him "fellow soldier", this designation is also given to Epaphroditus in Phil 2:25, but not much else is said about what this means.
- The Church in your house – Though the letter is private for Philemon he knows this might be read to others and wanted to let the Christians in the house church know Paul was thinking about them, just as he was thinking about Apphia and Archippus.
- Vs. 3 – This is Paul's signature when greeting his fellow Christians.
- Vs. 4-7 – Epaphras that gave him the news about Philemon's faith and love toward Jesus and the Saints. Loyalty is what is being praised here from Paul. Paul also is going to call on Philemon's generosity for Onesimus sake. He says for the "full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." Paul is giving Philemon great complements, but this is true of Philemon because Paul would never give lip service.

Read Philemon 1:8-11

- Vs. 8-9 - Being an apostle Paul had the authority to command Philemon to do what he is about to ask but wants to instead approach him as a friend and give him a chance to do what is right. Paul is appealing to Philemon's mercy by stating "old man" and "prisoner."

- Vs. 10 – Paul is accustomed to speaking about his converts as “his children” 1 Cor. 4:17, 1 Tim 1:2 and 2 Tim1:2. Onesimus came to him while in prison in Rome and there is where Paul converted him. Now Paul is revealing to Philemon that he has a strong love for Onesimus. Paul himself “father” to Onesimus.
- Vs. 11 – Onesimus means useful or profitable. So, Paul is using a play on words as he says at one time, he was useless to you, but now is useful to both of us. Paul wants Philemon to know that Onesimus was once useless, but now can be profitable to you and to me. How would he be profitable?
 - Onesimus can be useful to Philemon by performing the services which Philemon wanted to do for Paul but could not do in person.

[The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians](#)

[\(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)](#) pg. 213.

Read Philemon 1:12-16

- Vs.12 – Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon and wants him to know I am sending a beloved son, as Paul has already said I am like his father. There is deep emotion in this verse for Philemon.
- Vs. 13-14 – Paul would not keep Onesimus without Philemon’s approval because it would breach their friendship. How could Onesimus serve Paul if Philemon would not approve. Paul is being a faithful friend and giving back

to Philemon what is his. His slave. Paul could have kept him, but there is no love in that even when there is a chance that Paul could lose Onesimus by Philemon killing him as a deserted slave. “It would cheer Paul’s heart if Philemon acceded to his request cheerfully; his free and genuine consent indeed was essential.” [The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)](#) pg. 216.

- Vs.15 -16 – Paul wanted Philemon to do what is right because of his own will to do it and not do it because Paul compelled him by using his apostolic authority. He goes on to say he was parted from you for a while. Meaning Onesimus left Philemon as stated in the [beginning of this study](#), found Paul was converted and now is coming back to Philemon a new person. Paul says, “that you might have him back forever.” Means a Christian brother destined for eternity in heaven with the rest of the brothers and sisters. Onesimus is no longer a slave, but one of Philemon’s Christian brothers in Christ.

Read Philemon 1:17-18

- Vs. 17 – Paul is asking Philemon to receive Onesimus back into his household. If you consider me your partner in the spreading of the gospel treat Onesimus as you would treat me. Paul cares for Onesimus and wants

not only for him to be excepted, but Philemon to understand the change that Christ has done in both of their hearts.

- Vs. 18 – Put it on my account Paul says, for all that Onesimus has taken.

This could have been money stolen from Philemon to finance his journey to see Paul or it could have been the fact that he was not there to do the work a slave was purchased to do.

Read Philemon 1:19-22

- Vs. 19 - Paul here wants Philemon to know he is writing his promissory note with his own “handcuffed hands”, not his [amanuenses](#).

[The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)](#) pg. 219.

- Paul is requesting that Onesimus be taken back into the home and treated with respect not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. Paul, I think too believed Onesimus would fulfill his duties to his master as well. Put it on my account and I will repay the loses. Paul goes further and says to not use the fact that his ministry brought him and Onesimus to Christ, but as a friend that owes a debt. Why was Paul so confident about honoring whatever price Philemon chose to ask

for from Paul? There is no doubt Paul knew God would provide whatever was needed to make this debt right.

- Vs. 20 – Take Onesimus back and enhance your reputation as a leader in the mission from Christ. “Refresh my heart in Christ” Paul says, knowing what Philemon had done for the other saints in his home church.

Read Philemon 1: 21-25

- Vs. 21-22 – I know you will be the best you can be Paul says and will do what is righteous. Reading not only the letter, but between the lines in what Paul is asking. Be ready if God wills it and have a place prepared if Paul ever showed up. Even though Paul is in prison he never knew what could happen in the service of Christ, so he tells Philemon to prepare a room as he hopes someday to visits.
- Epaphras – fellow prisoner of Paul who brought the letter to the Colossians
- John Mark – There was a fellow servant, though Paul had a falling out Acts 15:37-39, was brought back into the fellowship as we all should do with our brother and sisters. He also wrote the gospel of Mark for Peter.
- Aristarchus - Was a Jew in the [diaspora](#) and a native of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2). In the story in Acts he was seized by the mob who recognized him as Paul’s companion Acts 19:29. Also, accompanied Paul on his return

to Jerusalem. More than likely, Aristarchus was guilty of breaking Jewish Law and the Jews had him imprisoned with Paul.

- Luke and Demas - Faithful Christians who served with Paul. Luke of course wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts, but the New Testament only references him 3 times; here in Philemon 1:24, Col 4:14, and 2 Timothy 4:11. Demas is only referenced Colossians and in Philemon. All we know of him is that he served Paul faithfully.