

Philemon

Philemon 1:8-17

Faith, Forgiveness, Friendship and Freedom

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Oakleaf Baptist Church, Orange Park, Florida
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Phm 1:8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

Phm 1:9 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.

Phm 1:10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

Phm 1:11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

Phm 1:12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

Phm 1:13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel:

Phm 1:14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

Phm 1:15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

Phm 1:16 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?

Phm 1:17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

Phm 1:8 Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient,

- Paul never for a moment relinquished his right of command as an apostle of Jesus Christ; but this verse, with the next, has the effect of saying, "Please do not consider the request that I am about to make as an order; it is not that at all, but an earnest plea from brother to brother."¹
- Or use much freedom of speech in the name of Christ, as an ambassador of his, and great authority as his apostle, which was given him for edification:²
- **Enjoin** = to arrange upon, order:—charge, command.³
- **which is convenient**, = hence of that which *comes up to the mark*;⁴

Phm 1:9 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.

- Beseech = to call near, invite, invoke, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) exhort(-ation), intreat, pray.³
- Being such an one as Paul the aged; or "the elder"; meaning either in office, which he might mention with this view, that his request might have the greater weight and influence; or else in years, and which he might observe partly to move compassion in Philemon, and that he might not grieve him in his old age, as he would, should he deny his request; and partly to suggest to him, that the advice he was about to give him, to receive his servant, did not come from a raw young man, but from one well stricken in years, with whom were wisdom and understanding; and therefore not to be treated with neglect or contempt:²

Phm 1:10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

- That is, my son in the gospel; one to whom I sustain the relation of a spiritual father;⁵
- Who has been converted by my efforts while I have been a prisoner.⁵

Phm 1:11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and

¹ Coffman, James Burton. "Commentary on Philemon 1:8". "Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament".. Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

² Gill, John. "Commentary on Philemon 1:8". "The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible". 1999.

³ Strong's Concordance

⁴ Vincent, Marvin R. DD. "Commentary on Philemon 1:8". "Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament". Charles Scribner's Sons. New York, USA. 1887.

⁵ Barnes, Albert. "Commentary on Philemon 1:10". "Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible". 1870.

to me:

- Onesimus = his name Onesimus, which means “profitable.” Not only was he “unprofitable,” but positively injurious, having “wronged” his master. Paul uses a mild expression.⁶

Phm 1:12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

- he comes not of his own head, but upon my persuasion, and upon my errand.⁷
- Receive him, that is, my bowels. Nothing could have been more powerful for assuaging the wrath of Philemon; for if he had refused to forgive his slave, he would thus have used cruelty against “the bowels” of Paul. This is remarkable kindness displayed by Paul, that he did not hesitate to receive, as it were into his bowels, a contemptible slave, and thief, and runaway, so as to defend him from the indignation of his master. And, indeed, if the conversion of a man to God were estimated by us, at its proper value, we too would embrace, in the same manner, those who should give evidence that they had truly and sincerely repented.⁸

Phm 1:13 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, St. Paul inserts the pronoun emphatically: I personally would have liked to do this. And the rest of the language is also indicative of much desire: ‘I was in the mind to hold (or keep) him unto myself.’ The spiritual father had become much bound unto his child in Christ, and the parting was not acceptable.⁹
- To serve me in thy stead — To do those services for me which thou, if present, wouldest gladly have done thyself.¹⁰

Phm 1:14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

- Herein is a lesson that many need to learn. It is always better to receive obedience because someone wants to do it instead of because they are forced to do it. Imagine your children. What brings more satisfaction to you as a parent: your child cleaning his room of his own accord, or his cleaning the room because you have commanded him to do it? This is the attitude we try to instill in our children regarding attending worship services. We go because we want to go, not because we have to go.

Paul is not going to force Philemon to help him (though Onesimus). After all, that would be giving the master no choice over his own property. In effect, Paul would have become the master. Instead, Paul sends the slave back so that it can be Philemon's own choice if he sends Onesimus back to him.

Notice that Paul gives a subtle suggestion. I am not going to keep him here without your permission. Instead I want you to choose to have the benefits which come from letting him help me. Paul is subtly suggesting that he wants Philemon to send Onesimus back to him. The only thing Paul has exclusively asked for is that Philemon receives Onesimus back as a faithful Christian (see also verses 16-17). But Paul also says "I know you will do even more than I ask" (verse 21).¹¹

Phm 1:15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

- For perhaps he therefore departed (or, was parted).—This is a further reason for sending Onesimus back. St. Paul now touches on Onesimus’ “being parted” from Philemon, using a phrase not only (as has been noted) euphemistic, but also one which suggested that his running away was, however unconsciously, overruled by a higher hand. God, in His wisdom, “parted” him from Philemon “for a season, that he might receive him for ever.” The phrase “for ever” is the word always used for “eternal.” The contrast with “for a season” might be satisfied here by the merely relative sense of “perpetual” or “life-long service;” but, considering that the phrase is used in direct reference to the brotherhood of the Communion of Saints, it is better to take it in its absolute sense, of fellowship in the life eternal.¹²
- A beautiful apologetic for the fugitive. He sinned, but even his sins are divinely overruled and transformed into an instrument for the good of you both.¹³

⁶ Jamieson, Robert, D.D.; Fausset, A. R.; Brown, David. "Commentary on Philemon 1:11". "Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible". 1871-8.

⁷ Bengel, Johann Albrecht. "Commentary on Philemon 1:12". Johann Albrecht Bengel's Gnomon of the New Testament.

⁸ Calvin, John. "Commentary on Philemon 1:12". "Calvin's Commentary on the Bible". 1840-57.

⁹ Schaff, Philip. "Commentary on Philemon 1:13". "Schaff's Popular Commentary on the New Testament". -90.

¹⁰ Wesley, John. "Commentary on Philemon 1:13". "John Wesley's Explanatory Notes on the Whole Bible". 1765.

¹¹ Cobb, Bradley. "Commentary on Philemon 1:14". "Bradley Cobb's Commentary on Philemon". 2014

¹² Ellicott, Charles John. "Commentary on Philemon 1:15". "Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers". 1905.

¹³ Whedon, Daniel. "Commentary on Philemon 1:15". "Whedon's Commentary on the Bible". 1874-1909.

Phm 1:16 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?

- The new relationship did not mean that Onesimus would be no longer a slave in the legal sense, for that was unaltered. The sense of the first phrase is thus, "no longer a servant only."

Brother ... beloved ... Any person obeying the gospel of Christ becomes the brother beloved of every other Christian, to whom all the rights, honors, privileges and love of Christian fellowship accrue as a right derived from their being "in the Lord"; and this is the heart of the great ethic which Paul here hurled in the face of a slave-owner. The institution of slavery would in time wither and fade away under the impact of such a concept as this. The apostle doubtless foresaw this; and yet, as Lenski said, "We fail to find the least hint here that Philemon ought to set Onesimus free."¹⁴

- Since Onesimus has become a believer, his status and relationship to Philemon are different. He is still a slave according to the Roman law, but he is more than that — he is a beloved brother. He is now really profitable. He can live up to his name for the first time.¹⁵

Phm 1:17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

- If thou count me therefore a partner — Κοινωνον, a companion, one having fellowship with thee in Christ, or a sharer with thee in the blessings of the gospel, the dearest bond of friendship; receive him as myself — Even as thou wouldst receive me, if I could have the satisfaction of paying thee a visit in person.¹⁶
- If thou count me therefore a partner; if thou holdest me for a friend - by our friendship entreat this. The strongest form of entreaty possible to be used. Κοινωνία in Acts 2:42 refers to the Holy Communion, and in 1 Corinthians 10:16-21 partakers of it are plainly called by implication κοινωνοὶ (παρτακερο, or, as we should say, "communicants." But here the sense is apparently as above; literally, a partner.¹⁷

- **Observe here, 1.** Another argument wherewith St. Paul doth press Philemon to receive Onesimus, and it is drawn from a partnership and communion with him in the faith; if we are partners, and have communion and friendship one with another as Christians, comply with my desires herein.

Learn hence, that there is a communion, a fellowship, a partnership. between saints, should make saints respect one another, If thou count me a partner, receive him; yea, receive him as myself; a very high expression, still discovering that affectionate tenderness which St. Paul bare to this new convert.

Observe, 2. Another objection answered; Philemon might say, how can I receive him that has wronged me, robbed me, and run away from me? Sure it is enough to pardon him; must I receive him too? Our apostle implicitly grants, that there was a debt due from Onesimus to Philemon; If he hath wronged; that is granting that he has done it.

Where note, Religion destroys no man's property, nor does communion of saints make a community of goods; otherwise from this community, Onesimus, or St. Paul for him, might have pleaded an immunity from both from restitution and punishment; St. Paul acknowledges, not denies the debt; but observe farther, he takes it upon himself, Put it on my account, I will repay it. It is not then unlawful in itself, for one person to become bound and surety for another; yea, it is a work of mercy, which not only may be done, but sometimes must be done, but always with due caution and consideration.

Observe, 3. The wonderful modesty of the apostle in mentioning his own praises and commendations, I say not that thou owest to me even thine own self; implying what great things he had done for Philemon in his conversion, so great as made Philemon a debtor, not only of his own goods, but of himself too: however, the apostle only glances at it modestly, and that upon a just and great occasion too: I do not say, (though I might have said it) that thou owest to me even thine own self besides.¹⁸

¹⁴ Coffman, James Burton. "Commentary on Philemon 1:16". "Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament". Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.

¹⁵ McGee, Dr. J. Vernon. "Commentary on Philemon 1:4". "'Thru the Bible' with Dr. J. Vernon McGee". 2008.

¹⁶ Benson Commentary on the Old and New Testaments

¹⁷ The Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010

¹⁸ Burkitt, William. "Commentary on Philemon 1:17". Expository Notes with Practical Observations on the New Testament. 1700-1703.