

# PHILEMON

Most of Paul's writings in the New Testament are letters to different Gentile churches that he helped launch and oversee. Often, these letters would include personal notes and exhortations to specific leaders. The entire book of Philemon is a short letter to one such individual to address a specific relationship. Philemon was one of the leaders in the Colossian church who had a conflict with one of the other members, Onesimus.

*<sup>8</sup> That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do. <sup>9</sup> But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me – Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus. <sup>10</sup> I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. <sup>11</sup> Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. <sup>12</sup> I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart. <sup>13</sup> I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. <sup>14</sup> But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced. <sup>15</sup> It seems like you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. <sup>16</sup> He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. <sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it. And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul!*

**-Philemon 1:8-19**

## APPLICATION

Onesimus was probably a former slave of Philemon's who ran away and likely took some money or property with him.

Slavery was prevalent in the Roman world, and runaway slaves were often dealt harshly with when they were caught. Somehow Onesimus made his way to Paul's jail cell and became a follower of Christ and a disciple of Paul – and one with gifts and abilities that Paul thought would be valuable for the work of the ministry. But there was one big problem. He had committed an unresolved sin against Philemon, another

disciple of Paul and a leader in the Colossian church. This conflict had the potential to hinder the effectiveness of both men of God. Onesimus needed to make it right with Philemon before Paul would release him to do ministry. Philemon needed to forgive and restore the relationship with his now new brother in the ministry.

We are called to forgiveness and reconciliation. We won't be effective in our Christian walk without returning to God for forgiveness of our sins, and we can't experience reconciliation with God until we are willing to forgive those who sin against us (Matt. 6:15). Although forgiveness is simply an act of our will – *we choose to forgive* – it's never simple in application because of the emotions attached to the offense. So, there are always layers to peel away, but it is a worthy discipline to pursue. Unforgiveness not only keeps us at a distance from God, it also eats away at our souls and strains our influence in the lives of those who are important to us. If someone has sinned against you, first acknowledge the offense. Endure the labor of peeling away the emotions that offense causes. Then CHOOSE to forgive, whether you receive an apology or not. In the same way, acknowledge your own sin and the hurt it causes the heart of God. Ask for His forgiveness and turn away from the sin.

## DISCUSSION/CONTEMPLATION

- Why is it so difficult to release the emotions attached to an offense?
- Ask God to forgive you of any unresolved sin in your life.
- Who in your life do you need to forgive? Consider the emotions their offense evokes.

## D6-CUSSION

Share a time when you had to forgive someone or ask someone to forgive you. Describe how you felt before and after.

- What stands out to you the most?
- What questions do you have?
- What is an application for your life?

## PRAYERS & PRAISE