

Approximately 35 minutes



Philemon: The Gospel That Restores

Opening Prayer:

Father God, in the name of Jesus, we thank You for Your holy Word. We thank You that even the shortest books of the Bible carry deep and life-changing truth. As we open the letter to Philemon, teach us about grace, forgiveness, restoration, and the power of the Gospel. Speak to the new believer and stir the mature believer. Let Jesus be exalted. Let hearts be softened. Let lives be changed. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Quick Historical Setting:

The book of Philemon 🙌 **Fy-LEE-mun** is one of the smallest letters in the New

Testament, only 25 verses, yet it carries one of the clearest pictures of the Gospel in action.

The apostle Paul is writing from prison, most likely during his Roman imprisonment around A.D. 60-62. He is chained, yet the Word of God is not chained. Philemon is a believer living in Colossae, and the church is meeting in his house. He appears to be a man of influence, a man of means, and a man deeply loved by the body of Christ.

Philemon had a slave named Onesimus 🙌 **Oh-NESS-uh-mus**. At some point Onesimus ran away. It also appears he may have taken something or at least caused some financial loss. Under Roman law, this was a serious offense. A runaway slave had very little legal protection. He could face severe punishment.

Yet in the providence of God, Onesimus crossed paths with Paul. Somewhere in

Rome, this runaway servant heard the Gospel and was **gloriously saved**. The man who had been a fugitive became a brother in Christ.

Now Paul sends Onesimus 👉 **Oh-NESS-uh-mus** back to Philemon with this letter. And this little letter becomes more than a personal appeal. It becomes a living illustration of the Gospel itself.

Verse 1-3: Grace at the Center:

Philemon 1-3(NIV) ¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— ² also to Apphia 👉 **AFF-ee-uh**

our sister and Archippus 👉 **Ar-KIP-**

us our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home:

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

Paul opens:

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker...” (Philemon 1-2, NIV)

Notice Paul does not begin by flexing apostolic authority. He begins with humility. He calls himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Yes, he is in Roman custody. But Paul does not see Caesar as the highest authority over his life. He sees himself as belonging to Christ.

👉 That is a beautiful reminder for us. The believer’s life is never ultimately in the hands of men. It is in the hands of Jesus.

Then Paul says:

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (v.3)

Grace always comes before peace. You cannot have peace with God until you receive the **grace of God**. This is not just a greeting. This is the foundation of the Christian life.

Verse 4-7: A Man Known for Refreshing Others

Philemon 4-7(NIV) ⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

Paul continues:

“I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus.” (v.4-5)

👉 What a testimony.

Philemon had faith toward Christ and love toward the saints. That is the right order. Real faith in Jesus will show up in real love for people.

Then Paul says:

“Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.” (v.7)

What a phrase: **you have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.**

👉 Ask yourself....Can that be said of us?

When people walk away from our conversations, do they feel

- refreshed or drained?
- Strengthened or wounded?
- Built up or torn down?

👉 Philemon was the kind of believer who encouraged and strengthened other people in their walk with Christ. His faith was not only correct in what it believed, but also evident in how he treated others.

This matters because Paul is about to ask Philemon to do something costly. And before he gives the appeal, he reminds him of the grace already working in his life.

Verse 8-14: Love, Not Pressure

Philemon 8-14(NIV)⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,⁹ yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man

and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.

Paul says:

“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love....” (v.8-9)

That is powerful.

Paul had authority. He could have commanded. But he chooses appeal over force.

Why?

Because the Christian life is not meant to be shaped only by outward pressure or mere commands. God works from the inside out, changing the heart. And when the heart is changed, love will take us further than law ever could.

Then Paul introduces Onesimus:

“I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains.” (v.10)

Paul led this man to Christ. Onesimus had become spiritually dear to him.

Then comes a remarkable line:

“Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.” (v.11)

- The name Onesimus carries the idea of usefulness or profit.

Paul makes a loving wordplay here. Before salvation, he was living beneath his calling. After salvation, he has become truly useful.

👉 That is what the Gospel does.

- Sin ruins.
- Grace restores.
- Sin distorts.
- Christ transforms.

A person may be smart, gifted, and full of energy, yet still miss the true purpose of life if he is apart from Christ.

👉 But when Jesus saves someone, that life is changed and becomes useful for God’s kingdom.

Many people feel they have wasted too much of their life, but in Christ the past does not have the final say. Jesus is able to redeem the years that sin has damaged and give a life new purpose.

Verse 15-16: The Gospel Changes Relationships

Philemon 15-16(NIV) ¹⁵ ***Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—*** ¹⁶ ***no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.***

Let us look at what Paul saying here:

“Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you

might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother...” (v.15-16)

This is one of the most touching moments in the New Testament.

Paul does not pretend that no wrong was done. Onesimus had run away.

- The past was real.
- The hurt was real.
- The loss was real.

But Paul gently asks Philemon to look at the situation through the wisdom of God.

Paul says, **“Perhaps...”** (v.15) That word matters.

- He is careful and humble. He does not speak as if he knows every detail of God’s secret plan. But he does point Philemon to a greater truth: God may have been working even through this painful separation.

Now everything has changed.

👉 Before, the relationship was master and slave. Now, through Christ, they are brothers.

This is one of the quiet but powerful ways Christianity changes the world.

The Gospel enters broken relationships and begins to transform them from the inside out.

In Christ,

- social position is not what matters most.
- Earthly authority is not what matters most.
- Human rank is not what matters most.

👉 What matters most is whether a person belongs to Jesus Christ.

- The world tends to define people by money, education, background, race, or social standing.
- But the Gospel asks a deeper question: is this person in Christ? And when the answer is yes, it changes the way we see one another.

Verse 17-19: A Beautiful Picture of the Gospel

Philemon 17-19(NIV) ¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.

Here is the heart of the letter:

“So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.” (v.17)

That is amazing.

Paul says, in effect, **“Receive Onesimus the same way you would receive me.”**

Then he adds:

“If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.” (v.18)

This is one of the most beautiful pictures of **substitution** in the Bible.

Onesimus had a debt he could not clear, and Paul said, **“Put it on my account.”**

👉 In the same way, that is what Jesus has done for us.

- We are the guilty ones.
- We are the ones who wandered away.

- We are the ones who owed a sin debt far beyond our ability to pay.

But Jesus stepped forward and said, “**Put their debt on Me.**”

👉 That is the Gospel.

- Christ took our guilt.
- Christ suffered in our place.
- Christ paid what we owed.

👉 And through Jesus’ sacrifice, He brings us back into fellowship with God.

And Paul says:

“I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back...” (v.19)

He personally signs the pledge.

👉 What a picture of **Christ’s finished work**. At the cross, our Lord did not merely speak about love. He signed the payment with **His own blood**.

This is why Philemon has often been called a miniature picture of redemption.

- Philemon represents the offended party.
- Onesimus represents the sinner.
- Paul represents the mediator.

👉 And behind it all we see Jesus, our greater Mediator, who not only pleads for us but pays for us.

Verse 20-21: Grace Goes Beyond the Minimum:

Philemon 20-21(NIV) ²⁰ **I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.** ²¹ **Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.**

Paul believes grace is already at work in Philemon. He expects obedience. But even more, he expects generosity.

That is how **grace works.**

Grace does not ask, “What is the least I can do?” Grace asks, “**How can Christ be honored here?**”

Forgiveness is not natural to the flesh.

- The flesh wants revenge.
- The flesh wants to hold the offense.
- The flesh wants to replay the wound.
 - 👉 But the Spirit of God leads us toward mercy, truth, and reconciliation.
- That does not mean wisdom disappears.
- It does not mean consequences vanish.
 - 👉 But it does mean bitterness cannot be allowed to rule the heart of a believer.

The Message for Us Today:

Philemon is not just about a first-century household problem..... It is about us.

- We are Onesimus by nature.
- We ran from God.

- We wasted what was not ours.
- We broke what we could not fix.
- We stood guilty.
- We could not pay our debt.

👉 But then grace found us.

Jesus did not save us by pretending our sin was small.

👉 He saved us by **paying for it fully.**

He did not deny justice.

👉 He satisfied justice.

He did not excuse our guilt.

👉 He took our guilt upon Himself.

And now the Father receives all who come through the Son.

- Not barely received.
- Not reluctantly received.

👉 **Fully received.**

Welcome him as you would welcome Me.

What words.... That is the believer's standing in Christ. Thank you Jesus!!!

Invitation to Be Born Again:

- Maybe today you realize you have been running from God.
- Maybe your outward life looks fine, but inwardly you know you are far from Him.
- Maybe shame has followed you.
- Maybe guilt has weighed on you.
- Maybe you know you owe a debt you cannot pay.

Listen carefully: Jesus Christ is able to save you.

- He died on the cross for your sins.
- He rose again from the grave.
- He paid the debt in full.
- And He offers forgiveness, new life, and peace with God to all who will come to Him by faith.

You do **“not”** have to **clean yourself** up first. You come to Christ as you are.....
Right now....

If you are ready to be born again, to turn from your sin and place your trust in Jesus Christ, pray this... or something like this....from your heart by faith:

Let us Pray....

“Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.... I know I have run from You..... I cannot save myself..... Thank You for dying for my sins and rising again..... Thank You for paying the debt I owed..... Please forgive me,..... cleanse me,..... and make me new..... I turn to You now and place my trust in You alone..... Be my Lord and my Savior..... In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Romans 10:9(NIV)⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

“If” you prayed that sincerely, the Lord hears you. Welcome to God’s family.....

- Now, go tell someone what happened to you.
- Write it down in detail what happened to you.
- Read or listen to His Word daily.
- Confess Christ openly.
- Get around other believers.
- Grow in grace.

Closing Prayer:

Let us Pray.....

Father God, thank You for this beautiful little letter. Thank You for the Gospel that restores, forgives, and transforms. Thank You that in Christ our debts have been paid. Teach us to forgive as we have been forgiven. Teach us to refresh the hearts of others. Teach us to see people through the eyes of grace. And may our lives reflect the beauty of Jesus Christ. In His mighty name we pray, Amen.



Matthew 28:19-20