NEW TESTAMENT · PAUL'S LETTERS · BOOK 57 OF 66

Philemon

Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved (v. 16)

25	Paul	c. A.D. 60–62	Onesimus
Verses, 1 Chapter	From Prison	Written	"Useful"

STRUCTURE

The Book in Three Parts

Paul opens with warm praise (vv. 1–7), makes his request gently and carefully (vv. 8–21), and closes with plans and greetings (vv. 22–25).



Each bar shows that part's share of the 25 verses.

I vv. 1–7 · 7 verses

Thanksgiving

Philemon's love refreshes the saints.

II vv. 8–21 · 14 verses

The Appeal

Receive Onesimus as a brother, as Paul himself.

III vv. 22–25 · 4 verses

Closing

A lodging, greetings and grace.

WHO'S WHO

The People in the Story

VV. 1, 9

Paul

"A prisoner of Jesus Christ," now "Paul the aged."

VV. 1, 5

Philemon

A believer at Colosse; the church met in his house.

VV. 10–16

Onesimus

Philemon's runaway servant, now Paul's son in the faith.

V. 2

Apphia

"Our beloved Apphia," perhaps Philemon's wife.

V. 2

Archippus

"Our fellowsoldier," perhaps Philemon's son.

V. 1

Timothy

With Paul as he writes.

VERSES 10–16

From Runaway to Brother

1 VV. 15, 18

He Departed

Onesimus left Philemon, perhaps owing him something.

2 V. 10

He Met Paul

"Whom I have begotten in my bonds": converted in prison.

3 V. 11

He Was Changed

Once unprofitable, "but now profitable to thee and to me."

4 V. 12

He Was Sent Back

Paul sends him home, "mine own bowels."

A PLAY ON WORDS

Onesimus Means "Useful"

Paul says Onesimus "in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me" (v. 11). In Christ, "Useful" has finally lived up to his name.

PHILEMON AT A GLANCE · PART 2 OF 2

Paul’s Appeal, Themes and Key Verse

VERSES 8–21

How Paul Appeals

Paul could have given an order. Instead he asks in love, and shows how to handle a hard conversation.

VV. 4–7

He Praises First

Thanks for Philemon’s love and faith.

V. 9

He Asks in Love

“For love’s sake I rather beseech thee.”

V. 14

He Respects Choice

“Without thy mind would I do nothing.”

V. 15

He Sees God’s Hand

“Perhaps he therefore departed for a season.”

V. 18

He Pays the Cost

“Put that on mine account.”

V. 21

He Trusts

“Thou wilt also do more than I say.”

> *“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?”*
>
> Philemon 16 (KJV)

VERSES 17–19

Put That on Mine Account

V. 17

Receive Him

“If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.”

VV. 18–19

I Will Repay

“If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it”

Many see here a picture of the gospel: Christ takes our debt on Himself, and God receives us for His sake (compare 2 Corinthians 5:21).

VERSES 23–24

Paul’s Companions

Epaphras

“My fellowprisoner.”

Marcus

John Mark.

Aristarchus

From Thessalonica.

Demas

Later forsook Paul.

Lucas

Luke the physician.

The same names appear in Colossians 4:10–14, a sign that both letters were sent together.

BIG IDEAS

Key Themes

Love

Asking for love’s sake.

vv. 5, 7, 9

Forgiveness

Welcome the one who wronged you.

vv. 15–17

Brotherhood

Servant and master, brothers in Christ.

v. 16

Standing in the Gap

Put that on mine account.

vv. 18–19

A Changed Life

Unprofitable made profitable.

vv. 10–11

Fellowship

Partners in the faith.

vv. 6, 17

KEY VERSE

“If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.”

Philemon 17 (KJV)