

## Philemon 1:8-17 – Onesimus, My Son

The first 7 verses of Philemon contain the usual greetings, the report Paul had received about Philemon and Paul's prayers for Philemon. Verses 8-17 contain the heart of why Paul wrote to Philemon. Paul wrote about Philemon's slave, Onesimus.

### Read Philemon 1:8-14.

We don't fully understand what Paul is talking about in verses 8-9 until we read verses 8-20. On what authority could Paul command Philemon to do something? ESV has "what is required". NKJV has "what is fitting". NASB has "what is proper". NIV has "what you ought to do". They are all in the same neighborhood. (1:8)

In verse 9, instead of commanding Philemon, what did Paul decide he would rather do? Why did Paul make this choice? The word "appeal" is used over 100 times in the NT. It can mean "appeal", "strongly urge" or "exhort". (1:9)

How did Paul describe himself in verse 9? "Old man" only occurs three times in the NT. It is used of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. It is used as one of four age groups in Titus 2; older men, older women, young women, younger men. A rare few translations have "ambassador" for "old man". (1:9)

Finally in verse 10 we find out who is involved in Paul's appeal to Philemon. Paul referred to Onesimus as his child. How was Paul "the father" of Onesimus? We know who was involved in Paul's appeal, but we still don't know what Paul was asking Philemon to do. We just know that his request involved Onesimus. (1:10)

How did Paul describe Onesimus before and after he became "Paul's child"? Paul used a play on the meaning of the name "Onesimus". "Onesimus" means "profitable". What did Paul mean by these descriptions of Onesimus? (1:11)

In verse 12, what was Paul going to do with Onesimus? How did Paul describe Onesimus in verse 12? In our culture, we would call this "beating around the bush". After 5 verses, we still don't know what Paul wanted Philemon to do. (1:12)

In verse 13, Paul mentioned what he would have liked to have had happen. It was wishful thinking because he already said that he was sending Onesimus back to his master. What did Paul wish he could have done with Philemon? (1:13)

Why didn't Paul keep Onesimus with him? Notice that Paul still had not made his request clearly known to Philemon unless there was some hidden cultural code that I don't understand. Did Paul want Philemon to release Onesimus to be with Paul and to minister to / with him? At first, that request would seem odd for Paul to send Onesimus from Rome to Colossae only to have him sent back. But verse 21 reveals that Paul actually hoped to be released from his bonds and to come to Colossae. There he could be reunited with Onesimus. (1:14)

### **Read Philemon 1:15-17.**

Verse 15 throws some doubt on the idea that Paul wanted Onesimus to continue with him. Obviously Onesimus was parted from Philemon for a time. What did Paul mean in the last half of verse 15? Did this mean that Onesimus would be Philemon's slave forever? (1:15)

Verse 16 helps us understand verse 15. How was Philemon to look at Onesimus now? What changed from the time Onesimus left Philemon to the time that he was sent back to Philemon? (1:16)

Verse 16 says that Onesimus was Philemon's brother in the flesh and in the Lord. We know what a brother in the Lord is. How were Philemon and Onesimus brothers in the flesh? This is an unexpected phrase, especially when contrasted with "in the Lord". (1:16)

Do you think that Paul was asking Philemon to free Onesimus? One issue that was never brought up was the repentance of Onesimus. Wouldn't Philemon want to hear that Onesimus was sorry for his actions and was seeking forgiveness?

In verse 17, how did Paul want Philemon to receive Onesimus? What were the implications of this? (1:17)