Commentary Quotes: Philemon

Unused quotes; **used quotes**

**On Philemon**

**It has been happily termed… “the polite Epistle.”**[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Terry Brown: Philemon is the wisdom literature of the New Testament—it is what the gospel looks like in a practical setting.**[[2]](#footnote-2)

**The epistle teaches practically what it means to be in Christ. Individualistic ideas and ambitions become secondary, and participation in the larger work of God becomes primary.**[[3]](#footnote-3)

**“Paul empties himself of his rights to compel Philemon also to waive his rights” (Luther).**[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Paul employs psychological and spiritual tact while at the same time not sacrificing his apostolic authority.**[[5]](#footnote-5)

**He knows who he is and whose he is. He is where he is “for the gospel.”**[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Christian fellowship involves participation in the lives of others**[[7]](#footnote-7)

His carefully constructed argument balanced three factors: his strong friendship with Philemon, his obedience to Roman law regarding runaway slaves, and his desire to help his new convert, Onesimus.[[8]](#footnote-8)

He [Paul] teaches slaves and masters to treat themselves, and each other, as human beings. Like the artist or poet, he does some of his finest work not by the obscure clarity of direct statement, but by veiled allusion and teasing suggestion.[[9]](#footnote-9)

It offers a blend, utterly characteristic of Paul, of love, wisdom, humour, gentleness, tact and above all Christian and human maturity.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**On 1:1**

In the major cities, most people lived in rooms, rather than houses, and the fact that he had a room large enough for a meeting suggests he had above-average means[[11]](#footnote-11)

Paul can use “fellow worker” to denote Christians in general (2 Cor. 1:24) but generally applies this designation only to people who have worked closely with him in significant ministry (Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2; Phlm. 24).[[12]](#footnote-12)

**On Apphia in 1:2**

**“She is as much a part of the decision as her husband, because according to the custom of the time, she had day-to-day responsibility for the slaves”** (Arthur A. Rupprecht, “Philemon,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 11:458).[[13]](#footnote-13)

New Testament references to house churches and their hosts are probably Mary at Jerusalem (Ac 12:12); Philemon at Colossae (Phm 2); Nympha at Laodicea (Col 4:15); Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus (1Co 16:19); Lydia at Philippi (Ac 16:15, 40); Jason at Thessalonica (Ac 17:5–6); Gaius at Corinth (Rm 16:23); Aquila and Priscilla at Rome (Rm 16:3, 5).[[14]](#footnote-14)

The New Testament provides numerous references to house churches and their hosts:

* Gaius at Rome (Rom 16:23)
* Nympha at Laodicia (Col 4:15
* Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19)
* Philemon at Colossae (Phlm 2)
* Aquila and Priscilla at Rome (Rom 16:3,5)
* Mary at Jerusalem (Acts 12:12)
* Lydia at Philippi (Acts 16:15,40)
* Jason at Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-6)[[15]](#footnote-15)

The home could be used for systematic teaching and instruction (Acts 5:42), planned presentations of the Gospel to friends and neighbors (Acts 10:22), prayer meetings (Acts 12:12), impromptu evangelistic gatherings (Acts 16:32), follow-up sessions with inquiries (Acts 18:26), evenings devoted to instruction and prayer (Acts 20:7), and fellowship (Acts 21:7).[[16]](#footnote-16)

**By making the issue of Onesimus a public one, Paul increases the pressure on Philemon to respond as he wishes. But we should not view the public nature of the letter as simply a lawyer’s tactic to win his case; it rather reflects the corporate nature of early Christianity, in which no matter was “private” but inevitably affected, and was affected by, one’s brothers and sisters in the new family of God.**[[17]](#footnote-17)

**On 1:3**

**Paul’s greeting was a Christianized form of typical greetings. The logical order preserves the way God works: Grace produces peace.**[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Our God is a God who has revealed himself as Father. He is a good Father, a great Father, a perfect Father. And because there is only one Father, there is only one family.**[[19]](#footnote-19)

**On 1:4-6**

Paul’s thanksgiving paragraph (4–6) is the shortest in his letters and is more closely related to the ordinary private and personal letters of the time.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**On 1:4**

**The prayer Paul records in verses 4-7 will be the basis for the appeal of verses 8-20**[[21]](#footnote-21)

**The Lord’s people are a community of believers… still it is individuals that come to Christ**[[22]](#footnote-22)

**Paul gave the readers insight into his prayer life**[[23]](#footnote-23)

The Greek text is “the love and the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and unto all the saints.”… The original construction is a chiasm.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The mention of faith and love anticipates a statement about hope. The triad typically occurs together, but hope is not discussed here.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**On 1:5**

Faith works by love, and love exercised towards the saints is a work of faith[[26]](#footnote-26)

**Paul’s opening prayer of thanksgiving looks ahead to the rest of the letter in anticipation of the continued outworking of God’s grace in Philemon’s life of love for the Lord’s people.**[[27]](#footnote-27)

**We should work hard at giving authentic praise to our brothers and sisters for the good things we see God doing in their lives. It will bless and encourage them-something we all need. It will also inspire and motivate them to keep on keeping on.**[[28]](#footnote-28)

The gospel of the Lord Jesus received by faith in Christ’s perfect atoning work cannot help but work itself out in tangible acts of love toward others. **God-given faith is active, dynamic; it does things!**[[29]](#footnote-29)

**On 1:6**

The result is that the church, instead of fragmenting, grows together ‘into Christ’

(v. 6). **There will always be forces that try to tear the church apart. But there will always be the gospel itself to point the way—of humility, forgiveness and reconciliation**—by which unity can be not only precariously preserved but solidly established.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Paul is not asking for a paternalistic willingness to let bygones be bygones. Nor is he offering good advice to Philemon on how to maintain a dignified detachment, untroubled by passion or anger. **He seeks the specifically Christian virtue of loving forgiveness, which will demand humility from both parties—Onesimus to seek forgiveness, Philemon to grant it. Onesimus must abandon fear: Philemon, pride.** And the thing which will induce both parties to do this is a theological fact, namely the fellowship (koinonia) which belongs to the people of Christ.[[31]](#footnote-31)

That this is something Paul prays for reminds us that **even the ‘good’ that we do is an outworking of God’s grace at work in our lives** (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 1:6).[[32]](#footnote-32)

**The heart cannot love what the mind does not know**[[33]](#footnote-33)

As Wright has particularly emphasized, then, the central theme of Philemon is *koinōnia*, “fellowship.”4[[34]](#footnote-34)6 This word is featured in v. 6, as Paul is laying the foundation for his appeal, and he picks it up, in another form *(koinōnos)*, as he transitions to his central appeal (v. 17; “partner” in TNI[[35]](#footnote-35)V). As we argue in the commentary, the phrase in v. 6 where this word appears has the sense of “the fellowship that is the product of our mutual faith in Christ.” Believing in **Christ joins us to other believers in an intimate family unit. Within that new relationship**, which takes pride of place in all our relationships and dictates how those other relationships are to be lived out, **we bear responsibilities for one another.** It is those responsibilities that Paul spells out in this letter. This short private letter stands, then, as an important reminder of the communitarian aspect of Christianity that many of us, in our individualist cultures, are so prone to forget. In Christ we belong to one another; we enjoy each other’s company and support; and we are obliged to support, to the point of sacrificing our own time, interests, and money, our brothers and sisters.[[36]](#footnote-36)

**Christians give to one another because they belong to one another.**[[37]](#footnote-37)

The use of the same word for good’ (*agathos*), which is used elsewhere in Philemon only in verse 14, suggests that this is yet another anticipation of Paul’s yet-to-be-made request. In verse 14 Paul refers to the ‘good’ (*favour*, NIV) that he is hoping Philemon will voluntarily do for Onesimus.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Paul’s argument is based on what has been called ‘interchange’, that mutuality of Christian life which, springing from common participation in the body of Christ, extends beyond mere common concern into actual exchange: if we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation… because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort (2 Cor. 1:6–7, with which compare 4:10–15 and of course Col 1:24). Philemon is to welcome Onesimus as if he were Paul, and to debit Paul’s bill as if *he* were Onesimus (vv. 17–19). The Greek word that says all this is *koinonia*.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The theme that dominates the letter—is that, in Christ, Christians not only belong to one another but actually become mutually identified, truly rejoicing with the happy and genuinely weeping with the sad (Rom. 12:15; cf. I Cor. I2:26; 2 Cor. 11:28–29). *Koinonia* is part of the truth about the body of Christ.[[40]](#footnote-40)

If Philemon allows the principle of mutual participation (itself part of his faith in Christ) powerfully to inform his thinking and living, then the right results will follow.[[41]](#footnote-41)

‘Unto Christ’ refers to the growth of the church towards that goal. Paul’s desire is that the fact of mutual participation, enjoyed by Philemon and his fellow Christians, will result in the full blessing of being ‘in Christ’, i.e. the full unity of the body of Christ: referring specifically in this case to the reconciliation of slave and master (cf. Gal. 3:28).[[42]](#footnote-42)

**On 1:7**

Thus the letter proceeds along the following lines: Paul wants Philemon to continue in his love for the saints; this love is something Paul thanks God for and brings him great joy and encouragement; this love refreshes the hearts of the saints; Paul would like Philemon to welcome Onesimus as a concrete instance of this love; Onesimus is Paul’s very ‘heart’; thus receiving Onesimus would refresh Paul’s ‘heart’ too. The word used for ‘heart’ (*splagchna*) is only used eight other times in the New Testament, but it occurs three times in this short letter.” It can refer literally to the internal organs of the body (Acts I:18), but more often in the New Testament it refers metaphorically to the internal ‘affections’ or ‘feelings’ of people, hence the translation ‘heart’ in English versions. Thus, in this context, to ‘refresh’ the ‘heart’ is to give fresh strength and new life of to ‘revive’ and revitalize the internal and emotional wellbeing of believers. This may also imply that Philemon is someone who is sensitive to and actively looks out for those who are in need of such mercy and care.[[43]](#footnote-43)

It is love that gives Paul the greatest encouragement, because it is the surest sign that Christ is being formed in his people.[[44]](#footnote-44)

The verb here is in origin a military metaphor, signifying the rest that an army takes while on the mach.[[45]](#footnote-45)

[Philemon’s love] brought joy, encouragement, refreshment (Phlm 7), and much more to everyone. Real love flowing from Christ in us to others always does![[46]](#footnote-46)

Church life is not about entertaining others; it is about serving others.[[47]](#footnote-47)

**On 1:8**

In ministry, and in life for that matter, few things are more important, more valuable, than knowing how to say the right thing. I will often remind my students that **we need to learn how to say the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, and to the right person**.[[48]](#footnote-48)

**Most interpreters agree that the body of the letter to Philemon begins at v. 8.**[[49]](#footnote-49)

As the emissaries of Christ commissioned to provide the foundation for the church, **the apostles were granted special authority to speak for Jesus** to the believing community (Matt. 10:40; John 17:20–21; Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20; 1 Thess. 2:6). Practically speaking, **they had the right to command Christians to act in certain ways**.[[50]](#footnote-50)

And it still holds true today that **if we reject the authority of the Apostles, we reject the authority of Christ. And if we reject the authority of Christ, we reject the authority of God Himself.**[[51]](#footnote-51)

On “what is right:” It **speaks to what is proper because of the Christian order of things**[[52]](#footnote-52)

**Our relationships to one another in Christ create expectations and impose obligations that cannot be ignored and that often go far beyond what any “law” might impose.** Love is foundational to Christian ethics (e.g., Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–15) and makes Christian ethics something that is open-ended, incalculable (as Jesus’ Parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates).[[53]](#footnote-53)

The power of the gospel is real and… it works. Not only can it change our broken

relationships with God; it can also change and heal our broken relationships with one another.[[54]](#footnote-54)

It is never right to be rude. It is never right for those who follow Jesus to be arrogant, abrasive, or uncouth. To be called “obnoxious for Jesus” is not a badge of honor, even if you may be in the right.[[55]](#footnote-55)

These relationships, of course, flow from the fundamental fact that each of these men has a relationship with Jesus Christ, and this relationship brings them into intimate fellowship as members of a spiritual family (see v. 6)…. This fellowship brings great blessing; it also imposes obligations.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Although Paul says that he could simply exercise his unique apostolic and Christ-given authority and command Philemon, nevertheless even this command should not be understood independently of what it means to belong to Christ since it will be the outworking of Christian love. Thus, the contrast is not between Paul acting as an apostle with independent authority and Paul acting in some other way. Rather, the contrast is between an instruction that could be given to any Christian as a command but is better carried out from another motivation.[[57]](#footnote-57)

**On 1:9**

**Paul figuratively walks up to Philemon, gives him a big hug, and puts his arm around him. The love they share with each other because of Christ is the basis on which he will encourage Philemon to do the right thing.**[[58]](#footnote-58)

**Orders are liable to be resented, from whomsoever they come, but an appeal from a friend is difficult to resist, especially when it is made expressly “for love’s sake.”**[[59]](#footnote-59)

**According to Hippocrates** [who lived 400 years earlier]**, a man was called πρεσβύτης from forty-nine to fifty-six**; after that, γέρων.[[60]](#footnote-60)

**On 1:10**

**If the language of ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ evoked the bond of close familial ties by being in the family of God, the language of ‘son’ and ‘father’ emphasizes this close bond even more.**[[61]](#footnote-61)

**The relationship between Paul and Onesimus was strong, like a father and son. The rabbis often used that metaphor to describe their disciples, and it applied equally to such Christian relationships.**[[62]](#footnote-62)

**By his return Onesimus indicates he is as hopeful for reconciliation as Paul.**[[63]](#footnote-63)

Thus this first mention of Onesimus’ name is accompanied with a crucial piece of information that makes all the difference for the subsequent development of Paul’s appeal since it makes all the difference in the relationships between these three men.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Paul saw God’s hand all over this.[[65]](#footnote-65)

**On 1:11**

**It was quite customary to give slaves names like this—not necessarily because they were in fact useful or profitable, but in the hope that, if they were called by such a name, their nature or conduct might come to match it.**[[66]](#footnote-66)

**We see Paul providing a helpful model for seeking to restore broken relationships…. He makes his appeal on the basis of the transformation brought about by new life in Christ through the gospel.**[[67]](#footnote-67)

Luther’s eloquent description, “**we are all His Onesimi**”[[68]](#footnote-68)

**The gospel radically changes us on the inside. This has to do with how I look to God. However, the gospel also changes us on the outside. This has to do with how we look to others.**[[69]](#footnote-69)

**On 1:12**

**Paul had no right to keep Onesimus; Onesimus needed to make restitution for his own sake; and the church needed the opportunity to see such an evidence of Christianity at work…. proper ends must be brought about by proper means!**[[70]](#footnote-70)

**Philemon would not have opportunity to think over Paul’s request before seeing Onesimus. Instead, facing Onesimus, the slave owner would need to decide right then.**[[71]](#footnote-71)

**The fellowship he enjoys with Philemon demands that Philemon be allowed to have final say in the matter of his slave Onesimus.**[[72]](#footnote-72)

**God is concerned with both the means and the end. We must be committed to doing the right thing in the right way for the right reasons.**[[73]](#footnote-73)

Ἀνέπεμψα is the epistolary aorist, by which the writer puts himself at the point of time when the correspondent is reading his letter[[74]](#footnote-74)

Onesimus is Paul’s *very heart*. Paul uses the word used in verse 7 as referring to internal affections. Thus the appeal on the basis of love is back in view here. Just as Philemon’s love for the saints (5) has meant that he has refreshed the hearts of the saints (7), then his love for Paul will refresh Paul’s heart (cf. 20) in welcoming one who is Paul’s *very heart*.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Wendell Grout says, “Paul was making an appeal for Onesimus, but he was basing that request on love, not apostolic muscle” (*Colossians and Philemon*, 156).[[76]](#footnote-76)

As so often with a good piece of writing, the power lies in that which is implied but not stated.[[77]](#footnote-77)

**On 1:13**

Onesimus is more than a mere substitute for Philemon. In these words the relation of master and slave disappears for the moment. Both are servants for Christ’s sake in the discharge of a ministry congenial to both. The suggestion is already conveyed by εὔχρηστον that Onesimus, in becoming a Christian disciple, has passed into a new and higher sphere of service, in which he and his master are on common ground. At the same time, **there is a hint that Onesimus, even as a slave, is rendering better service to the master whom he has wronged**, in thus serving Philemon’s friend and teacher; serving no longer as a menial, but in hearty sympathy with his master.[[78]](#footnote-78)

**Paul may also model what it means to live sacrificially, and this may in turn serve as an example for Philemon as Paul gets nearer to his request in verse 17.**[[79]](#footnote-79)

If Philemon concedes these points, the game is over. Even though in prison, Paul is the mid-point between the estranged pair.[[80]](#footnote-80)

**On 1:14**

**Truth and timing are twin essentials in resolving conflict.**[[81]](#footnote-81)

**As Paul gave up his rights (vv. 8–9), so he now gives up his preferences**: *But I did not want to do anything without your consent*. The aorist ‘I did not want’ refers to a single action of the will, contrasting with the previous imperfect ‘I was contemplating ...’. This statement does not imply that Paul is asking Philemon to return Onesimus to him.[[82]](#footnote-82)

**The goal of this reconciliation is to do the right thing out of proper motivation. God is just as concerned, if not more so, with the *heart* as with the *act*.**[[83]](#footnote-83)

**Philemon had the legal right to make decisions regarding his slave. But Paul actually says nothing about legal obligations. What he does say suggests rather that his concern is with the demands of Christian fellowship. What is vital in this matter, Paul suggests, are not the demands of society but the demands of the “new society,” the community of faith.**[[84]](#footnote-84)

Whenever we seek to resolve conflicts, we must identify where the responsibility lies. Further, those who are responsible must take responsibility.[[85]](#footnote-85)

When God is at work, all the actors in the drama are important.[[86]](#footnote-86)

**On 1:15**

**The sentence we are dealing with is about what Paul suspects might be God’s purpose in the circumstances of Onesimus’s situation**[[87]](#footnote-87)

**In** this process, of **attempting to understand a situation, from God’s point of view** and so responding to it in a Christian fashion, **there is always room for restrained speculation about the providential purpose that may underlie curious events.** **If** **it is true** that ‘in all things God works for the good of those who love him’ (Rom. 8:28), **it is also true that Christians are sometimes, and to a limited extent, privileged to catch a glimpse of how this is being accomplished.** **The *perhaps*** at the start of the verse **is the necessary qualification for all such claims: they remain a matter of faith, not sight.**[[88]](#footnote-88)

**Joseph, like Paul, held a steady belief in God’s providential overruling of human sin and folly. Patience and forgiveness grow well in soil like that.**[[89]](#footnote-89)

John MacArthur: “**God triumphs over sin through His providential power and grace. He takes the myriad contingencies of human actions and uses them to accomplish His own purposes.** (Colossians and Philemon, 223)”[[90]](#footnote-90)

**Paul assumed what he taught in Col 3:22–4:1. According to Paul’s instructions, slaves and masters can coexist as Christians *even in undesirable economic arrangements*.**[[91]](#footnote-91)

Matt Smethurst: **Church is where “it’s not my business” goes to die.**[[92]](#footnote-92)

Philemon’s attention is thus turned from his individual wrongs to the providential economy which has made these wrongs work for good[[93]](#footnote-93)

There is perhaps a play on words here between Paul’s statement that he wanted to ‘hold back’ (*katecho*, 13) Onesimus, but now Philemon will ‘have back’ (*apecho*, 15) Onesimus. The additional emphasis is that Philemon will have Onesimus back *forever*, that is, ‘eternally’ (NET).[[94]](#footnote-94)

Who was behind this action[[95]](#footnote-95)

Nothing sneaks up on God. Nothing is left to chance. There are no accidents or coincidences with God.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Paul’s introductory word “perhaps” (*tacha*) seems to warn that absolute knowledge about how and why things happen rests with God alone.[[97]](#footnote-97)

**On 1:16**

“**In the flesh Philemon had the brother for a slave; in the Lord he had the slave for a brother**” (quoting F.B. Meyer)[[98]](#footnote-98)

…**however difficult the situation, and however much Onesimus might have been at fault, God had a beneficial intention in view**[[99]](#footnote-99)

Paul does not say that Philemon is to receive Onesimus freed, and no longer a slave, which would be δοῦλον simply, but that, whether he shall remain a slave or not, he will no longer be regarded *as* a slave, but as a brother beloved. The relation between the master and the slave is transformed. The slave, even without ceasing to be a slave, is on a different and higher footing with his master. Both are in Christ.[[100]](#footnote-100)

The entire phrase ‘beloved brother... both in the flesh and in the Lord’ further explains the new development expressed in the preceding phrase ‘more than a slave.’ ‘Therefore, in view of the immediate context, it is possible that Paul uses the phrase ‘in the flesh’ to further explain what ‘more than a slave’ looks like for life in this world (i.e. not a separate category of ‘fellow human’ or ‘physical brother’). This would fit the development from verse 15 that began the further explanation in this verse. The new eternal transformation that is taking place in the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus affects their relationship both in this life, or in this world, as well as eternally. Therefore, as noted above, their relationship is now no longer one of merely master and slave but believing master and slave.[[101]](#footnote-101)

Nowhere in this letter does Paul tell Philemon, in so many words, to set Onesimus free, nor does he take it for granted that Philemon will do so. Rather he seems to take it for granted that Onesimus will continue to be Philemon’s slave, even though their relationship is now transformed by the fact that Onesimus is a Christian.[[102]](#footnote-102)

The passive verb “was separated” *(echōristhē)* is widely and, in our view, correctly viewed as a “divine passive”: a passive verb in which God is the implied agent.8[[103]](#footnote-103)3 [[104]](#footnote-104)

The action of “separation” has the purpose of restoring Onesimus to Philemon forever; and only by seeing God behind this separation does this purpose statement make sense[[105]](#footnote-105)

Paul is far from explicit about what he is asking. Partly because he wants Philemon to act on his own initiative, Paul asks nothing more definite than that Philemon welcome Onesimus as he would welcome the apostle himself (v. 17).[[106]](#footnote-106)

Philemon could certainly treat Onesimus as a “dear brother” while continuing to be his master. This is assumed in the “household codes,” which do not call on Christian masters to liberate their slaves but to treat them well (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1; cf. 1 Tim. 6:2).[[107]](#footnote-107)

**On 1:17**

**The central development in verses 8–16 that prepares for verses 17–22 is that Onesimus has become a believer. This now impacts the way that Paul, and more importantly Philemon, will respond to him.**[[108]](#footnote-108)

Here is one practical consequence of Paul’s great theological principle, that “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28; cf. Col. 3:11).[[109]](#footnote-109)

**On 1:18**

**It is not even clear that Onesimus has done anything wrong.** The particular way that Paul frames the condition (the so-called “first class” condition) **simply assumes the reality of the situation for the sake of argument.** It begs the question whether Onesimus had really wronged Philemon. Dunn puts it well: “… **it neatly serves the purpose of taking for granted Philemon’s view that Onesimus was guilty of serious misdemeanor, without wholly conceding that Philemon’s judgment was entirely correct**.”12[[110]](#footnote-110)0 [[111]](#footnote-111)

Having stated his request, Paul now turns to practicalities[[112]](#footnote-112)

**On 1:19**

**Paul was prepared to assume financial obligations in order to teach and live by spiritual truths.**[[113]](#footnote-113)

**Philemon owes his spiritual life to Paul’s ministry, reminding us of the interdependence of believers**[[114]](#footnote-114)

Barclay puts it, “Philemon is turned from creditor to debtor in the space of two verses, and loaded with a debt so large (‘your very self’) that he is under limitless obligation to Paul.”14[[115]](#footnote-115)0 [[116]](#footnote-116)

**On 1:20**

Optative the regular construction for **a wish about the future**.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Philemon is to respond to Paul because he, Paul, and Onesimus are all “in the Lord/Christ.”14[[118]](#footnote-118)5 **The fellowship that is created among those who have faith in Christ (v. 6) brings with it obligations to one another**.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Here, at the climax of the letter, we witness nothing less than **the radical application of the doctrine of justification to everyday living. No Christian has a right to refuse a welcome to one whom God has welcomed. Faith in Christ, the basis of justification, is the basis also of *koinonia*. Justification by faith must result in fellowship by faith.**[[120]](#footnote-120)

**All of us who live under the lordship of King Jesus must never forget who we once were. All of us were once like Onesimus, runaway slaves (sinners) from our rightful owner (God). But someone stepped in on our behalf, pled our cases, and even offered to pay our debts.** Paul never forgot this, and so he puts the basic principles of the gospel into practice in the Onesimus-Philemon issue-principles of substitution, satisfaction, and reconciliation.[[121]](#footnote-121)

**Those who have been reconciled to God through Christ (2 Cor 5:20-21) should be ever ready to do the same for others who have offended or wounded them. It may initially sting, but joy will surely follow.** Perhaps Ephesians 4:32 underscores this best. There Paul writes, “And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.” **We must never forget this: we will never forgive anyone as much as God in Christ has already forgiven us.**[[122]](#footnote-122)

By forgiving and reconciling with Onesimus, Philemon would refresh Paul, build unity in the house church he was a part of, and extend to Onesimus the same kind of grace he had received when he trusted Christ.[[123]](#footnote-123)

This verse concludes the body of the letter[[124]](#footnote-124)

**On 1:21**

**Perhaps it is better to think of this obedience as directed not to Paul personally but to what we might call the “gospel imperative.”**[[125]](#footnote-125)

**On 1:22**

**Paul is optimistic—something all Christians should be because of Jesus’s ultimate authority**[[126]](#footnote-126)

**Paul understood that his fate ultimately was in the hands of God. He also believed that in the economy of God’s ways, the prayers of his brothers and sisters made a difference.**[[127]](#footnote-127)

**“I hope that through your prayers”— human responsibility—”I will be restored to you”-divine sovereignty**[[128]](#footnote-128)

Few things are more of a blessing than having good friends, good brothers and sisters, whom you can count on. Knowing they have got your back and will be there for you is a precious gift from God.[[129]](#footnote-129)

**On 1:24**

**God saves us individually, one at a time. However, he did not save us to be islands unto ourselves. He saved us for community. He saved us for mutual accountability, encouragement, and life. He gave us a spiritual family to which our connection is thicker than blood ties. They help us grow in grace as we are more and more conformed to his image.**[[130]](#footnote-130)

**These men, then, stood with Paul on behalf of Onesimus. Paul knew they were faithful and trustworthy, and so did Philemon. Their “vote” in favor of Onesimus would have carried significant weight.**[[131]](#footnote-131)

**On 1:25**

**Whether he lets Onesimus go back free to serve Paul, or keeps him in his service, things cannot remain as they were.**[[132]](#footnote-132)

**Closing**

**Expressions of Christian thinking permeate the letter. First, two people were in need of reconciliation, and Paul sought a way to accomplish it, just as Jesus did. Second, Paul pleaded the case of Onesimus, taking the side of the guilty in calling for forgiveness. Similarly, Jesus pleaded the case of sinners, bringing them to the Father. Third, Paul offered to pay the debt Onesimus owed, even though it was not Paul’s responsibility. Jesus took the debt of sinners and paid it vicariously. Fourth, the reconciliation was, in essence, effected in Paul. He was the tie that brought Philemon and Onesimus together; through Paul, harmony was restored. Paul’s consistent theme “in Christ” reveals that he thought the same way regarding the God-human relationship. In Christ, humanity and deity are reconciled.**[[133]](#footnote-133)

**Luther’s eloquent description, “This Epistle showeth a right, noble, lovely example of Christian love. Here we see how St. Paul layeth himself out for the poor Onesimus, and with all his means pleadeth his cause with his master, and so setteth himself as if he were Onesimus, and had himself done wrong to Philemon. Yet all this doeth he, not with force, as if he had right thereto, but he stripped himself of his right, and thus enforceth Philemon to forego his right also. Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also doth St. Paul for Onesimus with Philemon: for Christ also stripped Himself of His right, and by love and humility enforced [?] the Father to lay aside His wrath and power, and to take us to His grace for the sake of Christ, who lovingly pleadeth our cause, and with all His heart layeth Himself out for us; for we are all His Onesimi, to my thinking.**”[[134]](#footnote-134)

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105. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm15&off=2044&ctx=specially+probable.+~The+action+of+%E2%80%9Csepar). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm16&off=4861&ctx=because%2c+of+course%2c+~Paul+is+far+from+exp). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm16&off=5893&ctx=status.+To+be+sure%2c+~Philemon+could+certa). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Thompson, Alan J. *Colossians and Philemon*. InterVarsity Press, 2022, p. ???. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm17&off=4871&ctx=he+apostle+Paul.116+~Here+is+one+practica). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. 120 Dunn, 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm18&off=1511&ctx=p+to+a+prior+issue%2c+~it+is+not+even+clear). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 428. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm18&off=3&ctx=+cf.+Col.+3%3a11).%0a18+~Having+stated+his+re). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Melick, Richard R. [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac32?ref=Bible.Phm18-19&off=1061&ctx=hemselves.+Even+so%2c+~Paul+was+prepared+to). Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991, p. 366. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. “Create an exegetical outline for Philemon 1:17-20 (using the Christian Standard Bible), and include the original Greek text (use the Nestle-Aland 28th edition)” prompt. *ChatGPT*, 06 Nov. 2023 version, OpenAI, 08 Feb. 2025, chatgpt.com. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. 140 Barclay, *Colossians and Philemon*, 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm19&off=5064&ctx=%2c%E2%80%9D+has+incurred.+As+~Barclay+puts+it%2c+%E2%80%9CPh). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 431. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Robertson, A. T. [*Word Pictures in the New Testament*](https://ref.ly/logosres/rwp?ref=Bible.Phm20&off=157&ctx=+only+here+in+N.%C2%A0T.+~Optative+the+regular). Broadman Press, 1933, p. Phm 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. 145 It is unlikely that these phrases have any more specific function, i.e., as indicating the “Christian manner” in which Philemon is to bring benefit to Paul (R. P. Martin, 167) or as indicating that Onesimus will be freed for service “in the Lord” (Knox, *Philemon*, 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm20&off=3079&ctx=int+that+they+make%3a+~Philemon+is+to+respo). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Wright, N.T. *Colossians and Philemon*. IVP Academic, 2008, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, pp. 182-183. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
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124. Moo, Douglas J. [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Phm20&off=67&ctx=s+on+this+section)%2c+~this+verse+concludes). William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 431. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
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126. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, pp. 184-185. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Pace, R. Scott, and Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Colossians & Philemon*. Holman Reference, 2021, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
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133. Melick, Richard R. [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac32?ref=Bible.Phm&off=26777&ctx=rd%E2%80%99s+(Phil+2%3a5%E2%80%9311).%0a~Expressions+of+Chris). Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991, p. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
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