

**Philemon 1** Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ,  
and Timothy [ writer of the Epistles ] our brother  
to Philemon our beloved and fellow worker.

Paul refers to himself as a prisoner. This means that he is not calling rank on Philemon or Onesimus. These two men must make up their own minds from doctrine in their souls regarding what Paul writes. Philemon and Onesimus must respond from their souls, not from Paul giving order which he will not do. They all will make independent decisions as members of the Royal Family of God.

**v. 2** Also to Ápphia our sister. Also to  
Archíppus our fellow soldier and to the church in  
your home.

Apphia is Philemon's wife and Archippus is Philemon's son.

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

This salutation is used to establish that what follows function under the principle of grace from which emerges soul prosperity. Philemon's home is the meeting place for the church at Colossae.

**v. 4** I keep thanking my God at all times, at that  
time making mention of you in my prayers.

Paul indicates that his friendship is a source of thanksgiving for him toward Philemon. When believers are mature they have mutual respect for each other and offer consistent prayers for them.

**v. 5** Because I hear reports of your love and  
doctrine resident in your soul, which you keep  
having face to face with the Lord Jesus, and  
toward all saints.

The report to Paul is by Epaphras, the pastor of the Colossian church, regarding Philemon regarding what wonderful progress he has made in the plan of God. Epaphras is on leave from the church and is consulting with Paul who is imprisoned in Rome.

The report of Philemon's love for the Word is extremely important to Paul since it indicates the man is grace oriented. Within the Royal family there is a rapport that exists regardless of the circumstances that exist among them.

Philemon is a wealthy man and Onesimus is one of his slaves. The problem that exists between them is that Onesimus has stolen money from his owner and absconded to Rome. This is where Paul came to know the man.

Onesimus had flaunted the money he stole but later came into the acquaintance of Paul and with Epaphras. He has grown in grace, gotten his mind right with the Lord, and has spent two years growing in grace while in Rome and under the tutelage of Paul.

Regardless of a person's social standing, we are all one in Christ Jesus. From that mutual acquaintance in the Royal Family, each person is enabled to grow in grace and advance in the plan of God which this man has done.

**v. 6** In order that our association with reference to your doctrine resident in the soul may become operational toward Christ by means of epignōsis knowledge of all the intrinsic good which is doctrine in the canon of Scripture in you.

It is because Paul and Philemon share the same inventory of ideas from which emerges fellowship. Paul is appealing to doctrine as the coin of the realm that is intrinsic good in the soul of the believer.

From this soul inventory, Paul is preparing Philemon for the grace crisis that will emerge when he returns Onesimus, his runaway slave and escaped criminal, back to him.

Philemon must keep concentrating on doctrine in order to focus on his relationship with the Lord rather than on the man who stole his property.

**v. 7** For I have come to have much happiness and encouragement by your love for God because the deep and tender affection of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Paul begins this verse by stating that he has unalloyed happiness and encouragement from Philemon's personal love for the Lord, his occupation with Christ because the morale of believers has been refreshed through you, fellow believer.

The word "refreshed" is perfect passive indicative of the verb ἀναπαύω (*anapaúō*): "To renew, replenish, or revive; something that provides new strength or vigor."

The present tense is iterative which describes an event that repeatedly happens. Paul receives the action of the verb from Philemon's love of doctrine. Paul is therefore refreshed by the knowledge that Philemon's influence in the Colossian church had stabilized many weak believers.



Philemon is in functioning in the sophisticated spiritual life but his advanced level of spiritual maturity is about to be tested. For him to pass the test he must be able to use the problem-solving device of the Royal Law. This is why he calls Philemon “brother,” or fellow member of the Royal Family.

Philemon is living the copacetic spiritual life because his level of maturity has overflowed to his wife Apphia, his son Archippus, to believers who meet in the Colossian church at his house, to his slaves who work in his estate, and also to Paul who is imprisoned in Rome.

Now Paul is going to put Philemon to the test. He is going to propose that he take Onesimus back into his care even though the man had stolen from him a left for Italy.

The Royal Law functions on behalf of the person who is injured. Philemon is the injured party. He properly considers Onesimus a thief and a criminal. But new information from Paul is going to put Philemon to the test.

Now that Onesimus is not only a believer but a reformed man under the tutelage Paul and in Rome, Paul is sending him back to Colossae and back into the care of Philemon. The challenge that is put to Philemon follows:

**v. 8** Therefore, though I might have maximum authority by means of Christ to command you to do your duty.

Paul is an Apostle. Philemon is simply a positive believer. But Onesimus is the property of Philemon who has stolen money from him. Onesimus is indebted to his former master and Philemon rightly may have him arrested or banished. Paul, however, does not play the Apostle Card but approaches Philemon as a fellow believer. Paul gives a synopsis of what has transpired in Onesimus’s life since he arrived in Rome:

**v. 9** because of your love of Jesus Christ, I encourage you even more, being such a person as Paul, an ambassador, and also right now a prisoner of Jesus Christ,

**v. 10** I appeal to you on behalf of my son/student, Onesimus, whom I have fathered into doctrine in my chains.

**v. 11** The one formerly 'useless' to you, but now to you and to me is very useful.

**Philemon 12** Whom I sent back to you . . .  
the same one, that is, my own very tender  
affections

**v. 13** whom I kept desiring to detain for  
myself in order that on behalf of you he might  
keep on ministering to me in my chains of the  
gospel;

**v. 14** but, without your consent, I did not  
want to do anything in order that your integrity  
should not be from compulsion, but from your own  
free will.

**v. 15** Perhaps, for this reason, he was  
separated for a short period of time in order that  
you should have this same one back forever.

**v. 16** No longer as a slave but more than a  
slave, a beloved brother, most of all to me, but  
how much more to you, both in the flesh, and in  
the Lord?

Though still a slave, Onesimus is equal to Philemon as fellow members of the Royal Family of God. Whether he remains a slave or Philemon emancipates him, he is still a believer who has advanced to the sophisticated spiritual life. Onesimus and Philemon are brothers in Christ.

**v. 17** If therefore you have me as a partner,  
and you do, receive him as you would receive me.

Principle: No grace crisis can be resolved except by grace. Legalism can only produce division while grace results in grace blessings. This is the principle Paul will now relate to Philemon:

**v. 18** But, if he has wronged you or owes  
you anything, and he does, charge this to my  
account.

The word “charge” is the present active imperative of the verb **ἐλλογέω** (**ellogéō**): “to debit Paul’s account.” It is impossible for Onesimus to pay back what he stole. But he was an unbeliever, but now, not only saved, but also an advanced believer. Things are different now.

Where previously, Philemon was allowed to throw Onesimus out of his estate or worse hand him over to Roman authorities, he is now dealing with a brother in Christ who has been vouchsafed by Paul to be a man who can now be trusted. Paul now certifies the transaction:



**Philemon 19** I, Paul, have written this by my own hand, I will pay the damages . . . so that I do not have to mention to you how much you owe me, even yourself.

Paul is reminding Philemon that everything among believers is based on the foundation of grace. Paul evangelized Philemon; he tutored him in grace all the way to spiritual maturity. He did so all in grace.

Paul has a right to ask Philemon to receive Onesimus, but he had no right to ask Philemon to absorb any financial loss which might be involved.

Principle: Forgiveness and salvation is wonderful for the one forgiven and saved. But the one doing the forgiving and saving must suffer loss, unless a third party, who intercedes to the forgiver on behalf of the forgiven, agrees to pay the bill.

Such an intercessor has been the benefactor for all of those involved in this discussion. Paul, Epaphras, Philemon, Onesimus, Philemon's family, et al. Jesus Christ paid justice's price for our violations of divine integrity through personal, sinful violations of divine righteousness's immutable standards.

Having now been saved by grace, advanced by grace, and sustained by grace, those who by grace are able to receive in grace those who have offended them, stolen from them, abandoned them are among those who are able to resolve issues by the application of the Royal Law.

**v. 20** Alright, brother, let me have profit from you . . . because of the Lord. Refresh my deep affections in Christ.

The verb refresh in this verse is an aorist active imperative. The aorist tense is ingressive and stresses the beginning of an action or entrance into a state or function. Christ is the ultimate source of refreshment.

Paul is appealing to Philemon to refresh him by his grace orientation that is undergirded by unconditional love for another believer who has changed his life through grace and is now quite a different person from the one Philemon knew before.

Principle: The Royal Law functions on behalf of the person who is injured. Philemon is the injured party. He properly considers Onesimus a thief and a criminal. But new information from Paul has put Philemon to the test. What Philemon is now challenged to do is to use the Royal Law, unconditional love toward the one who formally robbed him. This man will reappear a wholly different man. When he asks forgiveness, the Royal Law requires the injured party to forgive and to forget.



**Philemon 21** Having confidence in  
your obedience to doctrine I wrote to you knowing  
that you will do even more over and above what I  
say.

Paul now leaves the issue in Philemon's hands. He does not trust Philemon to accept Onesimus under the Royal Law. Paul is however confident that Philemon will apply the Word of God to the situation and do what grace requires.

The right thing for Philemon to do is forgive Onesimus and welcome him back into the fold. But even more so, grace would follow the example of Jesus Christ who not only enabled us to be forgiven through faith alone in Him but to also receive manumission—emancipation—from the slave market of sin.

**v. 22** And at the same time also prepare me  
a lodging for I anticipate through your prayers I  
shall be graciously provided for you.

Finally, Paul anticipates his own manumission from Roman authorities. At such a time it is his desire to travel to Colossae and visit Philemon, Onesimus, and others of the household.

**v. 24** Likewise, Mark [ writer of the  
Gospel ], Aristarchus [ a Thessalonian Christian  
and companion of Paul ], Demas [ companion of  
Paul but who deserted him during Paul's last  
imprisonment ], Lucas [ Luke, the writer of the  
Gospel ] my fellow prisoners.

**v. 25** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be  
with your spirit.

