

# Philemon 8-18

## May 1, 2022



### SCRIPTURE

<sup>8</sup> Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, <sup>9</sup> 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— <sup>10</sup> that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,<sup>[a]</sup> who became my son while I was in chains. <sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

<sup>12</sup> I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— <sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.

### COMMENTARY

Verse 8. Here Paul began his appeal for Onesimus. The phrase “for this reason” translates to a Greek term that means “therefore” and refers to evidences of Philemon’s love and graciousness. Paul could have commanded Philemon to forgive Onesimus. The words “great boldness” in Christ emphasized Paul’s apostolic authority. As Christ’s emissary, Paul spoke and acted in Christ’s authority. He reminded Philemon that he was foregoing his right to demand obedience. The phrase “what is right” referred to Philemon’s accepting Onesimus as a Christian brother.

Verse 9. Instead of making a demand, Paul appealed to (entreated, implored) Philemon on the basis of love (agape, Christian love). Love was a dominant characteristic of Philemon’s life, and Paul wanted him to extend that love to Onesimus.

Verse 10. Paul appealed to Philemon for his (spiritual) son, whom he fathered while in chains. In confinement, Paul had won a new convert to Christ. After establishing his close relationship with the new Christian, Paul gave the convert’s name—Onesimus. We only can imagine Philemon’s shock.



Verse 11. Paul employed an effective wordplay on the name “Onesimus.” The name means “profitable” or “helpful.” As Philemon’s slave, he had not lived up to his name. By running away, he had shown himself to be useless (unprofitable). Christ had transformed Onesimus, however, so that he was useful to both Philemon and Paul.

Verse 12. Although Paul was sending Onesimus home, the letter gives no indication that Onesimus was returning against his will. The phrase a part of myself expresses Paul’s strong emotional tie to Onesimus and is the equivalent of “my heart.”

Verse 13. Paul wanted to keep Onesimus with him. Evidently, Onesimus already had rendered valuable assistance to Paul. Again, the apostle stressed his imprisonment was for the gospel—because of his missions ministry. If Onesimus stayed, he could serve Paul in Philemon’s place—on Philemon’s behalf. Paul could have justified keeping Onesimus with him on the grounds that Onesimus really was representing Philemon, who thus was rendering service to Paul.

Verse 14. Paul could have kept Onesimus and merely have informed Philemon that he had done so. He would not make that choice, however, without Philemon’s consent (literally, “mind”). Paul wanted Philemon’s good deed (literally, “kindness”) to be done willingly, not out of duty.

Verse 15. Paul saw the possibility of a positive result from what appeared to be a negative situation. Everything hinged on Philemon’s forgiving Onesimus. Onesimus’s separation from Philemon for a brief time resulted in the slave’s conversion. Now Philemon would get him back permanently in a new relationship—an eternal relationship.

Verse 16. Paul did not direct Philemon to set Onesimus free but opened the door to the possibility. Paul urged Philemon to welcome Onesimus home and—by implication—to forgive him. Paul wanted Philemon to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave, but more than a slave. Onesimus had been mere property. Now Philemon was to accept Onesimus as a dearly loved brother—a fellow Christian toward whom Philemon was to extend God’s kind of love

## **MAIN POINT**

Life in Christ demands that friends who have hurt one another heal together.



## **INTRODUCTION**

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

**When you hear the phrase, “Hurt people hurt people,” does a particular person or situation come to mind? If it would be appropriate and beneficial to the group, explain.**

**Why do you think forgiveness is such a hard thing to do—both in general and specifically for you?**

**If someone did something to betray a close friend, how would you likely counsel that friend: walk away, get even, get mad, forget about it, forgive, something else? Why?**

A variety of factors contribute to how easy or difficult it can be to forgive someone who wrongs us. In some cases, we might even wonder, “Can friends who hurt each other ever really befriends again?” In Paul’s letter to Philemon, he addressed a situation that likely posed such a problem. In doing so, Paul reminds us that forgiving those who mistreat us is not easy, but it is always important and is precisely what God did for us in Christ.

## **UNDERSTANDING**

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

- *ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILEMON 8-13.*

**Based on verses 8-9, why did Paul think it was his right, even his responsibility, to speak to Philemon about his relationship with Onesimus?**

**How did Paul’s understanding of what it means to love people contrast with the way many today think about what it means to love others?**

**Does this mean you also have a responsibility to call others to forgiveness when relationships go wrong? Explain.**

Paul wasn’t mad at Philemon. He didn’t talk down to him or minimize the hurt Onesimus had caused him. Instead, what drove Paul’s letter-writing was his love for the Lord, his love for both friends, and his commitment to maintain unity in the body of Christ. Love and unity among believers were—and still are—imperative for the effectiveness of the church in spreading the gospel.



**What arguments might people make to counter Paul’s appeal, “on the basis of love” (for my sake, for the sake of fairness, for the sake of not being betrayed again, etc.)?**

**What would change in your life if your relationships were driven by love above all else?**

**From these verses, what did Paul want Philemon to do?**

Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his master Philemon and perhaps had even stolen money from him. Paul acknowledged that Philemon had been wronged. Yet, he also challenged Philemon to forgive Onesimus.

**How had Onesimus changed since he had betrayed Philemon?**

**Onesimus had spent some amount of time as Philemon’s slave. So why did Paul say he had been useless to Philemon? What did he mean that Onesimus was now “useful” to them both?**

**Did he mean Onesimus would now be a better slave, or do you think he meant something else? Explain.**

**Should your forgiveness of others depend on whether the person deserves your forgiveness? Explain.**

**How has God forgiven you?**

**Is love something you feel or something you do? What about forgiveness—is it a feeling or a choice? Explain.**

You can offer forgiveness to others based on love as one who has experienced God’s grace. This forgiveness must be given willingly, not under compulsion. As a believer, you will grow in love as you do what’s right for its own sake.

- *ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILEMON 14-16.*

**What did Paul mean when he wrote that perhaps the reason for Onesimus’s betrayal was so that Philemon might “get him back permanently”?**

**Do you believe that God can and wants to use even the betrayal of a friend for your good and His glory?**

**What are some specific ways we can demonstrate that belief?**

**What do you learn about forgiveness and reconciliation from this passage?**



Christians share with other believers the experience of having been forgiven by God. This transforms the relationships you had even before you came to know Christ. You are now related in the family of God and should relate to others in love as God has done to you

## **APPLICATION**

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.*

**In what situations is it difficult for you to choose gentleness and persuasion instead of a power play?**

**How is God speaking to you about that?**

**In terms of reconciliation and forgiveness, how might seeing others' need for Jesus impact how you relate to them?**

**What are you doing to remind yourself of God's grace to you in Christ?**

**What are some ways you can express gratitude to Christ for His forgiveness?**

## **PRAYER**

Thank God for His forgiveness in your life. Ask Him to help you recognize and appreciate His grace rightly so that you might forgive those who have wronged you.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

*Encourage your group members to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we celebrate Mother's Day:*

**May 8, 2022 --- 1 Samuel 1**

