



## Paul's Letter to Philemon

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### The Personal Implications of the Gospel

Paul's letter to Philemon is written to a church leader named Philemon in Asia Minor who had some relationship work to do in his own household. His household servant Onesimus had escaped and run away to the care and ministry of the Apostle Paul.

The book teaches us that it is possible to be a Strong Christian and still have some very difficult interpersonal work to do in our own household. Paul was grateful for Philemon and his Christian Witness. Love for God's People, Faith in Jesus, Partnership. He had perhaps supported Paul in a financial way or some other service, generous.

According to Roman law Philemon had every legal right to hold another person as property. But, just because a person has a legal right to do something, it does not mean that it is the right thing to do. From a worldly perspective, Philemon had every right to demand his slave be returned. He wasn't the only one who had claims to rights.

Paul had every right to "order" Philemon to release him, every right to demand that Onesimus stay serving him. As a human being and a child of God, Onesimus had every right to be free. It is in these competing rights and interests that this relational conflict is ripe between these three men.

Things any of these players in this difficulty could have done...What is at stake?

- a. Emotion and hurt—violations.
  - i. Did Philemon consider Onesimus "useless" v11
  - ii. Did word get back to Philemon that Paul had been using his servant without asking?
  - iii. Paul's pastoral disappointment with a person he led to the Lord who has treated a fellow human and brother in Christ so poorly.
  - iv. Emotion -- Lost Cause, this could never be fixed.
    1. Too much at stake, emotions run too deep, hurts are too great.
    2. Cut your losses and move on—let the chips fall.
2. Model Humility and Freedom—Give Space for the Holy Spirit and Agape Love to work in a person's heart and bear fruit in human relationship.
  - a. Paul removes every worldly barrier to Philemon needs to make the right choice.
    - i. Christianity for Slavery
      1. Misunderstanding of how Christianity works vs. the way of the world.
      2. Externally Force Change—Heart Change. Permanent.
      3. Many Christians do not understand this.
      4. Demand rights, Insist on our own way, we get easily offended.
    - ii. Paul willingness to pay the debt--
    - iii. Think theologically, think lovingly.
    - iv. Onesimus willingness to return to Slavery
  - b. Application to Various contexts
    - i. Marriage and family
    - ii. The Church
    - iii. Forgiving someone even if they are not repentant.



# The Bible Challenge

A daily guide to reading the Bible in a year

- iv. Releasing someone from a debt that they owe
- v. Paying someone else's debt
- 3. The Christian Life brings New Creation...
  - a. As Jesus begins to transform our hearts more and more of these kind of complex areas are discovered. Navigate through them and get things in the right order and put it right.
  - b. One of the worst things that can sabotage us in our Christian life is pride.