

Study Buddies:

Quick Bible Reference Guides

PHILEMON: The Power of Love and Forgiveness

Note: this sheet was prepared based upon the Contemporary English Version of the Bible, however it is always good to use more than one version as a reference. This practice will enable you to compare the language of the translations and gain a fuller understanding of the text.

Overview

This brief “book” is a letter that Paul wrote to a wealthy church member named Philemon. Like many of the wealthy people who lived during this time and in this culture, Philemon owned a slave. The purpose of this letter was to reconcile Philemon with his slave, Onesimus.



Beyond human circumstance, this letter captures the necessity of love and forgiveness.

It also touches upon equality in the body of Christ no matter what station in life one has been dealt.

Key Points and Verses

Please read the whole book to gain the fullest experience. These points are just a few of the highlights that have been encapsulated from the text.

- The meaning of “Onesimus”—usefulness vs. uselessness
- vs. 8-10: Courage in Christ; Love in Christ
- vs. 14: Kindness from the heart
- vs. 16: No longer a slave but a brother
- vs. 19: unpaid debt?

Study Questions

1. Paul tells Philemon that he is in jail “for serving Christ Jesus”. What do you think this means? Can you think of other people who have been imprisoned because of their faith? How can Christians help people in this situation?
2. Everything we know about the wealthy Christian Philemon and his slave Onesimus is contained in this letter. What significant change has Onesimus experienced since leaving his master's household? (10). How did this change his relationship with Philemon? If Onesimus had intentionally run away from his master Roman law would have allowed Philemon to punish him severely, perhaps even have him put to death. What does Paul encourage Philemon to do instead? (12-20).
3. What does Philemon have to say about how Christians should treat one another? What can be learned from Paul's example and the actions he took on behalf of his friend Onesimus?

Something to Think About

(additional food for thought)

If Onesimus probably ran away, why do you think that the text phrases his escape as: “was taken away” [CEV], or “was separated/parted from” [NIV/RSV]? What meaning do you attribute to the passive voice in this verse?