

## *From the Garden to Glory*

# Philemon

**Author:** Paul the Apostle

**Written to:** Philemon

**Timeline:** c. 60 - 64 A.D. written from a Roman prison

**Category:** Epistle

**Theme:** Forgiveness and Restoration

**Purpose of writing:** Paul wrote to ask Philemon to show mercy and grace to the runaway slave Onesimus.

### **Introduction:**

While Paul was a prisoner in Rome, by God's providential hand, he met Onesimus, a slave who had run away from his master Philemon. Paul shared the gospel and Onesimus gave his life to the Lord. Paul wrote this personal letter to his friend Philemon asking him to receive, forgive and restore Onesimus.

As we begin our study of the book of Philemon consider the following questions and write your responses:

1. Consider what you know about the great Apostle Paul. If he were to have written *you* a letter, what would you have wanted him to write about?
2. As you read in the Introduction, Onesimus had providentially been brought face to face with Paul while Paul was in prison. Think about your own life. When has the Lord guided a situation or circumstance

by His providential hand? How did this impact your relationship with Him?

3. The book of Philemon provides valuable insights on the institution of slavery in the Roman Empire. At the time of the New Testament, slaves often became powerful and could hold almost any profession including those of musicians, doctors, librarians or accountants. While many freemen lived in poverty, many slaves were much better off because they were assured of the master's provision and care. In what ways does this describe your relationship with your Master, the Lord?

## **A Christian Gentleman**

Read Philemon 1-7

1. In verses 1-2 Paul used the following three terms to describe Philemon, Apphia (possibly Philemon's wife) and Archippus (possibly Philemon's son). Name one person in your own life who fits each of these descriptions and then one person who might use this description for you.
  - beloved friend
  - fellow laborer
  - fellow soldier
2. Look at verse 6. What did Paul say would make the sharing of Philemon's faith effective? What does this mean?
3. Write out verse 7. Who has brought you refreshment, great joy and consolation by his/her love? How did he/she do so? To whom can

you extend joy, consolation and refreshment this week? How will you do so?

## **A Prisoner's Plea**

Read Philemon 8-25

1. Look at 8-14. How did Paul refer to Onesimus in verses 10 and 12? Although Paul could have used his apostolic authority to order Philemon to accept Onesimus, what did he do instead? Why do you think Paul did this?
2. Paul asked Philemon to receive Onesimus *no longer as a \_\_\_\_\_ but more than a \_\_\_\_\_--a \_\_\_\_\_* (verse 16). If you had been Philemon, what might have gone through your mind as you were asked to receive your runaway slave as a brother in Christ? Can you share a time that your relationship with another person was altered when you became fellow believers? How did the dynamics of the relationship change?
3. Read verses 17-20. What did Paul offer to do? In what way do you think that reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon would have brought joy and refreshment to Paul's heart?

## **A Picture of Christ**

1. Look at verses 8-9. Although Paul could have used his apostolic authority and commanded Philemon to receive Onesimus, what did he do instead? What does *for love's sake* mean? How has the Lord worked in your life *for love's sake*?

2. Read the following commentary by Warren Wiersbe about the book of Philemon.

"Receive him, that is, mine own heart" was Paul's plea...Verse 17 is what Jesus Christ says of every true believer, "Receive him as Myself!" We are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6)...Christ found us as runaway slaves, law-breakers, rebels, but He forgave and identified us with Himself. He went to the cross and paid the debt for us.

Read and meditate on verse 18. Consider the fact that Jesus asked the Father to put all of *your* sins and transgressions to *His* account. (See Luke 23:34 and 2 Corinthians 5:21) Take some time today to express your gratitude to Him.

## **Summary**

As you conclude your study of the book of Philemon consider the following questions and write your answers:

1. What is the most significant thing that you have learned from your study about the Lord, His character, or His attributes? How does this encourage you? Take a few moments to thank and praise the Lord for the things that you have learned about Him.
  
2. What is the most important lesson or new insight that you have learned from your study of this book? How can you apply this lesson in your life this week?