

**Lesson #8 • Philemon 1:8-25**

**“Regarding Onesimus”**

• H A N D O U T •

▶ Last time we only looked at Paul's salutation to Philemon. We stopped short of Paul disclosing his reason for writing. In this study lesson we learn that Paul's reason for writing is to discuss Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus,  
This is where we pick up the letter and the story ...

**Paul speaks on behalf of Onesimus...**

Philemon 1:8-11 • Therefore, although in Christ I might be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love.

I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

Q: Why did Paul say he “could be bold and order Philemon to do what he ought to do?”

Q: Instead of ordering Philemon to do what Paul was asking, what does Paul do?

Q: Why does Paul refer to himself as “an old man?”

▶ **There are two ways to look at this:**

1.

2.

Q: Paul finally gives what reason for his letter to Philemon?

Q: Onesimus is a slave and his master is Philemon. Why does Paul refer to him “as his son?”

Q: How would Onesimus, a runaway slave from Asia Minor, come in contact with Paul, a prisoner in Rome?

Q: What does Paul mean when he says that at one time Onesimus was useless to Philemon but now he has become useful to both Paul and Philemon?

Q: What do we know about why Onesimus ran away?

Philemon 1:12-16 · I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. 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. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good— 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 man and as a brother in the Lord.

Q: How does Paul describe his emotional attachment to Onesimus?

Q: What is it that Paul hopes will happen once Onesimus is back in Colosse with Philemon?

Philemon 1:17-21 · So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.  
I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

Q: What does Paul mean when he speaks of Philemon being his partner?

Q: How does Paul ask Philemon to welcome Onesimus?

Q: What commitment does Paul make to Philemon?

Q: What are the implications of Paul's guarantee to Philemon.

Q: Why does Paul belabor the point that he wrote these words himself?

Q: What is Paul referring to when he reminds Philemon that “*you owe me your very self?*”

Q: What is Paul requesting when he uses the words “wish” and “may” when asking for some benefit from Philemon in the Lord?

Q: Should this passage be viewed as Paul, in a subtle way, assaulting the social and economic institutions of his day that produced slavery?

Philemon 1:22-24 · And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

Q: What does Paul's “one more thing” suggest to us?

Q: What do we know for sure about the whereabouts of Paul at this point in time?

**Paul ends this Epistle by sending greetings from five of Paul's co-workers.  
He then closes this beautiful letter with a blessing ...**

Philemon 1:25 · The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Q: Why does Paul specify that “Christ be with your spirit?”

EPILOGUE:  
DO WE KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ONESIMUS?

► It seem unlikely that Paul ever made it to Colossians. But, in A.D. 110, the bishop of Ephesus was named Onesimus. If Onesimus was in his late teens or early twenties when Paul wrote this letter, he would then be about 70 years old in A.D.110 and that was not an unreasonable age for a bishop in those days.

Bible scholar, and Anglican Bible commentator, John Trapp, [1601<->1669] wrote that Ignatius the Bishop of Antioch and a recognized early Christian writer, made mention of Onesimus in his writings, describing him as the assistant pastor of Ephesus, under Timothy. He said that Onesimus was stoned to death in Rome during the reign of the emperor, Trajan.

There is also some historical evidence that all of the letters Paul wrote were first gathered together as a group in the city of Ephesus. It is thought that Onesimus might be the compiler and he was the one who included this personal letter to Philemon because it became his charter to freedom.

Is it certain that Philemon's runaway slave and the assistant pastor of Ephesus are one and the same person? No, we have no *certain* evidence of that. But there is a *good* possibility and I want to believe they are the same person. If it is true, then it is a great example of the power of a transformed life.

**From our Side-Road study of the Letter to Philemon,  
which was instigated by Paul's admonishment regarding the treatment of Slaves,  
we now return to our original study:  
Chapter 4 of the Book of Colossians.  
This is where we will begin next time ...**



**Next Time ◆ Lesson #9**

**“The Inward & Outward Life of a Christian”**

