

## NEW TESTAMENT LETTER: PAUL'S REQUEST FOR PHILEMON

Paul's letter to Philemon contains a short but powerful message. Philemon was a Roman citizen from Colossae who became a follower of Jesus and a friend of Paul. While imprisoned, Paul developed a close relationship with Onesimus, Philemon's runaway servant.

Onesimus also became a believer in Jesus and a student of Paul. In this letter, Paul boldly asked Philemon to accept Onesimus upon his return – not as a slave, but as a brother. In only a few sentences, Paul highlighted the transformation that comes from following Jesus and asked Philemon to follow in the example of Christ's humility and forgiveness.

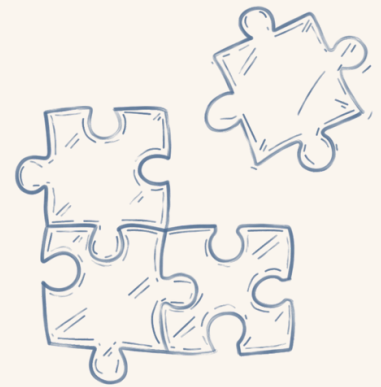
## MAIN IDEAS: PAUL ADVOCATES FOR ONESIMUS

- **Despite Philemon's past, Paul saw him as valuable and helpful.** (Philemon v.11)
- **Onesimus became a follower of Jesus and a disciple of Paul during his imprisonment.** (Philemon v.13)
- **Paul urged Philemon to respond to Onesimus with forgiveness and understanding.** (Philemon v.16)
- **Paul honored Philemon's faithfulness, trusting that he would respond with grace.** (Philemon v.21)

## EXAMPLE OF GOD'S CHARACTER: UNITY THROUGH CHRIST

In the book of Colossians, Paul addressed the people of Colossae, including Onesimus. In this letter, Paul encouraged the believers to walk in the way of Jesus. In Colossians 3:11, Paul emphasized the unifying nature of following Jesus. In Christ, all believers are united in one body. Colossians 3:11 states that there is no division between ethnicities or cultures in God's family. This verse addresses the circumstances of Philemon and Onesimus specifically by saying that there is no slave or free, but Christ is all and in all believers. God's family is made up of all types of people who are unified by their faith in Jesus as the Savior.

The letter of Colossians summarizes Paul's call to believers: to be a unified, diverse family of God. Paul's letter to Philemon addresses a specific person and a specific circumstance. If Colossians is the instruction, Philemon is the application. Paul urged Philemon to act upon his faith and live out the direction he had been given in Colossians. Although Philemon's response is unknown, Paul trusted that he would welcome Onesimus as a brother in Christ.



## JESUS IN PHILEMON: PARDONING THE GUILTY

The book of Philemon revolves around the mercy of Onesimus, the previous master of Philemon. In the letter, Paul explained his experience with Philemon and shared that he had become a follower of Jesus. Instead of ordering Onesimus to forgive Philemon, Paul asked him to treat Philemon as a brother in Christ. Paul did not insist that Onesimus spare Philemon out of obligation or compulsion; instead, he desired for Onesimus to welcome Philemon back as a humble act of faith. Paul provided Onesimus with the opportunity to do as Jesus did and pardon Philemon for his wrongdoing. Paul trusted that Onesimus had been transformed by Christ and that he would act accordingly.

Similarly, Paul embodied Christ by paying the price for Onesimus' wrongdoing. Whatever cost Philemon lost when his servant ran away was covered by Paul. Because of Paul's love for Onesimus, Paul repaid Philemon for his loss.