

Receive Him as a Brother: Philemon 1:8-25 Explained

Scriptures for Today

Philemon 8-25

Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, 9 Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. 10 I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: 11 Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: 12 Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: 13 Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: 14 But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. 15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; 16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? 17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. 18 If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; 19 I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. 20 Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. 21 Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say. 22 But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. 23 There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; 24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers. 25 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Written from Rome to Philemon, by Onesimus a servant.

Introduction — The Gospel in Action

This is a real situation between real people where the gospel has to be applied. Onesimus had wronged Philemon and left, but now he is coming back after believing on Jesus Christ.

The question is not whether Onesimus changed. The question is whether Philemon will respond correctly to that change. This passage shows how the gospel affects relationships, forgiveness, and responsibility.

Paul Appeals Instead of Commands

Philemon 1:8-9

Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

Paul makes it clear that he has authority. He could command Philemon to do what is right and expect obedience. But instead of commanding, he appeals for love's sake.

He wants Philemon to respond willingly, not under pressure. That shows that obedience is not just about doing what is right, but doing it from the right heart and understanding why it is right.

2 Corinthians 9:7

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

As he purposeth in his heart, so let him give. Doing things from the right heart is a commandment from God. Understand why this is right.

Onesimus — A Complete Change

Philemon 1:10-11

I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:

Paul calls Onesimus his son because he led him to Christ. That is where the change began. Before that, Onesimus was unprofitable, meaning he was useless or even harmful.

Now he is profitable to both Paul and Philemon. The gospel did not slightly improve him. It completely changed his direction and value.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

When we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a change but that change cannot be physically seen. There is a new creature. There is a new man or a new woman within you. The old things are passed away.

Now, you still have the old man. The old man is the sinner who is dead. The new man is this new creation that doesn't sin. But you get a choice to walk in the new man or the old man. When someone walks in the old man they look the same and there aren't changes. But Onesimus has that new man. He is now profitable to Philemon and to Paul.

Receive Him Personally

Philemon 1:12

Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

Paul sends Onesimus back and commands Philemon to receive him. He then adds how deeply he feels about Onesimus by calling him his own bowels, showing strong personal connection.

This is not just about letting him return. This is about receiving someone who has been changed and now matters deeply. He is a brother in Christ. He is family. No matter what he did in the past, he is family now. Make sure you hear me on this.

When someone believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, they are family now. And we need to treat them that way. No matter what they did in the past, they are family.

And yes, sometimes that's difficult to do. But this book is an example of exactly that. So the importance of this book is very, very high because some people can't let the past of others go — even though they know Jesus paid for all sins. Let it go. Jesus did.

Willing Obedience Matters

Philemon 1:13-14

Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: But without thy mind would I do nothing, that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

Paul explains he wanted to keep Onesimus because he was useful. But he refused to act without Philemon's agreement.

He did not want Philemon to feel forced. He wanted him to choose to do what is right willingly, showing that true obedience comes from the heart. Paul is giving Philemon the chance to make the right decision.

We should also follow Paul's guidance here in many things. Give people the chance to make the right decision. Don't force it. Let them make their own choices. Teach them how to make the right choices.

God Used the Situation

Philemon 1:15

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

Paul points out that what happened may have been used by God. Onesimus left for a time, but now he returns permanently in a better condition.

This shows that God can take a bad situation and bring something good out of it. The outcome is greater than what was lost.

From Servant to Brother

Philemon 1:16

Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

This is the key shift. Onesimus is no longer just a servant. He is now a brother.

The gospel changes relationships. What he was before does not define how he is treated now. In Christ, he is family.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Receive Him As Paul

Philemon 1:17

If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

Paul sets the standard clearly. Philemon is to receive Onesimus the same way he would receive Paul. This removes any excuse to treat him differently. His past is not the focus. His present condition is – a man saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Debt Is Transferred

Philemon 1:18-19

If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

Paul deals directly with the issue of debt. He does not ignore it or excuse it. He takes responsibility for it.

This is a clear picture of what Jesus Christ did. The debt is real, but it is placed on someone else who pays it. Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, became sin for us. You see something similar happening here.

And we are supposed to act in this same way. Someone else owes someone. I will repay it. Take a close look how Paul is doing things here for his brother in Christ.

Go Beyond What Is Asked

Philemon 1:20-21

Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

Paul expects obedience, but he also expects more than the minimum. This is not about barely doing what is required. When someone understands the gospel, they should go far beyond what is asked. They should respond fully and willingly.

Refresh my bowels in the Lord. Bowels are deep inner feelings – your heart, emotions, and inward affection that God designed us to have. It's not talking about the physical body here. It's talking about the deep feelings within. Deep care and deep concern.

And you should have that for your brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to care deeply for others.

Fellowship and Grace

Philemon 1:22-25

But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Paul expects to come see Philemon again, showing confidence that things will be handled correctly. Other believers are mentioned, showing this is part of a larger work.

The letter ends with grace because everything in this situation is built on grace. All of it. And we **MUST** have that same grace as well. Give people more chances. Help them when they don't deserve it.

What This Means

This passage shows the gospel in action. A man who was wrong is now changed. A man who was wronged is called to forgive. A debt is taken by someone else. This is exactly what Christ did for us, and this is how that truth is supposed to affect how we live. You will see pictures of the Gospel all over the Bible, and this is yet another one.

Practical Applications

1. The gospel completely changes a person – a new creation. What someone was before does not define who they are now in Christ.

2. Forgiveness is required when the truth is clear. You cannot hold a debt that Christ has already paid.
3. Relationships change in Christ. People are not just roles or positions. They are brothers.
4. Christ took your debt, and that is the standard for how you treat others.

Conclusion

Onesimus was unprofitable, but now he is profitable. He was a servant, but now he is a brother. That change came through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul says receive him based on what he is now, not what he was before. That is exactly what Christ has done for you.

So the question is simple. Will you receive others the way Christ received you? Same exact thing. So please stop rejecting people who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is very important. Check your deep concern and deep feelings for others.

Let's pray.