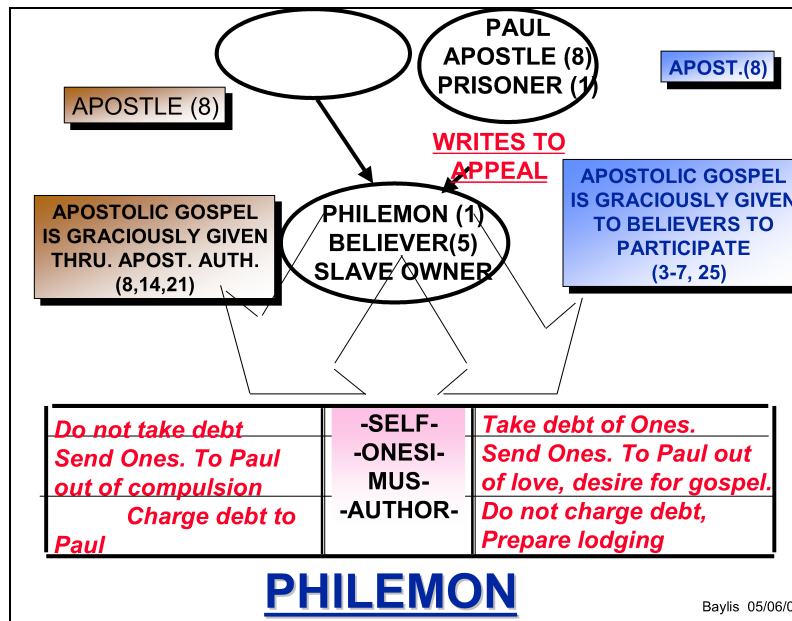


PHILEMON



SITUATION

Paul is in prison (1). During his imprisonment he met Onesimus, an escaped slave (16) owned by Philemon, who came to Christ through Paul (10). Now Paul is sending him back to Philemon with this letter so that Philemon would return him to Paul to assist him in spreading the gospel as an emissary.

PROBLEM

Paul needs the following things accomplished and wants to give Philemon the chance to do these things from his heart instead of under the compulsion of the Apostolic command of Paul.

- Send Onesimus back to Paul to use for his service
- Do not charge what was stolen to Onesimus’ account but forgive it.
- Prepare a lodging for Paul when he comes following his release.

SOLUTION

Paul explains to Philemon the grace of God that Philemon has received through Paul’s ministry as an apostle and desires that Philemon show that mercy to Paul’s requests.

Based on Philemon's love of the gospel and of Paul's ministry, Philemon will eagerly send Onesimus to aid Paul as an apostolic emissary, will take care of Onesimus' debt himself, and prepare a lodging for Paul's visit following his release.

Argument

- I. **Introduction:** Paul introduces himself and Timothy as authors, and Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus as recipients, declaring himself as a prisoner and the readers as fellow workers in the apostolic church (1-3).

Paul is a prisoner (suffering) and that Philemon, Timothy, and the others are all part of his apostolic family working for the gospel. This is to develop their commonality in purpose of the Apostolic gospel so that Philemon will feel part of it and continue in that ministry with respect to Paul's requests.

1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker, 2 and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- II. **Their Common Theology:** The basis for expectation of Philemon's action with respect to Paul's requests is that of love for the gospel and for the saints (4-7).

Paul will focus on Philemon's love based on the apostolic doctrine (faith) which has resulted in the refreshment of saints (including himself (20)). Again, this will encourage Philemon to continue that by answering Paul's requests.

- A. **Position:** Believers in Jesus and lovers of the fellow saints (1:4-5).

1:4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints;

- B. **Future Application:** Based on Philemon's position Paul urges that he act based on that faith toward helping other believers (6)

1:6 *and I pray* that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

- C. **Theology/Application:** Philemon has acted to give comfort to believers in the past based on Paul's apostolic message (7)

1:7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

III. **The Requested Activity:** Philemon is to send Onesimus back to Paul to aid him out of love for the apostolic gospel, not out of compulsion (8-22).

The choice that Paul gives Philemon is not whether to send Onesimus back to him or keep him as a slave. There is no indication that keeping him as a slave was an option. The choices are to do it under compulsion by direct order of Paul, or to do it on his own out of love. In other words, Paul is presenting him the need, and Philemon has a choice. It is not in Paul's option list that Philemon could refuse.

A. **Contrast of possible motivations:** Since Paul is an apostle, and Philemon is a believer in the gospel, Philemon is required to obey Paul's orders yet Paul would like Philemon to respond from his heart on his own (8-9)

Paul gives Philemon the choice of compulsion or of heart desire in several verses.

1:8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ *to order you to do* what is proper, 9 *yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you* -- since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus –

B. **The Action Required:** The action that Philemon must make is to send Onesimus back to Paul since Paul desires to keep him to minister (10-13)

10 I appeal to you for *my child*¹ Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

C. **The Reason for the Action:** Paul simply states here that the only reason that Onesimus was sent back to Philemon was so that Philemon could make a clear choice; that is to send him back to Paul out of his own free will. The implication is thus, that if he does not send Philemon back immediately, Paul will order him to do so. (1:14).

1:14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

¹ This is the same term used for Timothy and Titus. It refers more than just to their salvation, since Timothy clearly was saved at his grandmother's knee. The term means 'image' or imitator. They were representatives of Paul in the spread of the gospel.

- D. **Theological Basis (sovereignty):** The circumstances of Onesimus' escape and salvation *may* have occurred so that Philemon *and* Paul might benefit from him, since if he is given by Philemon to Paul to spread the gospel, then he represents Philemon and Paul for the Lord (15-16).

Paul suggests that the circumstances may have been controlled perhaps for the very purpose to provide Paul an emissary for both Philemon and Paul.

1:15-16 *For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,* 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

- E. **Application:** Paul wants Onesimus to be received as an emissary (already) of Paul's, charging anything that Onesimus has stolen to be charged to Paul's account (but Philemon owes Paul for the gospel, so the implication is that he could take the debt himself) (17-19).

When Onesimus comes, Paul wants Philemon to treat him as if he was Paul, which is an emissary of Paul. Thus Paul is indicating that Onesimus is going as if in Paul's stead. Thus Paul automatically states that Onesimus' debt is the same as Paul's debt, since he is a representative of Paul's. However, based on the love of the gospel, and Philemon's desire to refresh Paul, he could take care of the debt himself.

1:17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me. 18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

- F. **Application:** Paul wants Philemon to send Onesimus to help him as an emissary of the gospel (20-21).

Paul only speaks of Onesimus in terms of his present status as an apostolic emissary. While Onesimus was useless for the gospel as a slave when he was unsaved now the opportunity exists for Onesimus to represent both Paul and Philemon in refreshing the saints as an emissary. He would be an emissary of Philemon as explained in v. 13, he would minister to Paul. Paul also has demonstrated his need, mentioning his imprisonment, and his age in v. 9. Thus these conditions of Paul and his ministry impel Philemon to have a chance to do something for God.

1:20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

1:21 *Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.*

G. **Application:** Paul asks for lodging for his visit after his release (22)

Paul, like his emissary Onesimus, is also coming to Philemon and desires that Philemon take care of him also. This personal contact demonstrates the fellow partnership of Philemon in the gospel of Paul. While it is not stated explicitly should Philemon not do this freely, Paul's visit would likely be the time he was ordered to do it.

1:22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

IV. **Conclusion:** Reminder of those emissaries already with Paul who are working for the gospel (23-25).

Paul now continues on as he opened with a listing of those who plod together in the gospel message with him. Particularly the fellow emissaries, the ranks of whom Onesimus will soon join. (Note that in Colossians 4:9, Onesimus is listed among the ranks of the emissaries of the apostle, thus giving credence to the point that Philemon had complied. In addition, note that Paul states he is one of the Colossians number indicating Philemon's house church was in Colossi.)

1:23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, 24 *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.