

# THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON:

## An Expanded Paraphrase

### I. SALUTATION (vv. 1-3)

**T**o Philemon, our dear friend and fellow-worker, with our sister Apphia and our fellow-soldier Archippus, and the church that meets in your house, this letter comes from Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus, and our brother Timothy. Grace and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

### II. THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER (vv. 4-7)

I always thank my God, Philemon, as I remember you in my prayers, for I hear good news of the love and loyalty which you show to our Lord Jesus and all His holy people. So I pray that your Christian liberality, springing as it does from your faith, may lead you effectively into the experience and appreciation of every blessing which we have as fellow-members of Christ. Your love has brought me great joy and comfort, my dear brother; you have refreshed the hearts of God's people.

### III. REQUEST FOR ONESIMUS (vv. 8-22)

That is why I am making this request of you; I am making it for love's sake, although I could quite well exercise my authority in Christ's name and command you to do the proper thing. Yes, I could command you as Paul, ambassador of Christ Jesus; but I don't do that: I prefer to ask you a favour as Paul, the *prisoner* of Christ Jesus. The request I am making is on behalf of my son. My son? Yes, my son; I have acquired him here in prison. His name is Onesimus—useful by name and useful by nature. I know that in former days you found him quite useless, but now, I assure you, he has learned to be true to his name—useful to you, and useful to me.

Well, I am sending him back to you, though it is like tearing out my very heart to do so. My own inclination is to keep him here with me, and then he could go on serving me while I am in prison for the gospel's sake—serving me as your representative. But I do not want to do anything without your consent; I do not want the good turn you are doing me (by means of his service) to be done by you willy-nilly, but on your free initiative.

For aught I know, this was why you and he were separated for a short time, so that you might have him to yourself for ever, no longer as a slave, but as something much better than a slave—a dear brother, very dear indeed to me, and surely still dearer to

you, since he is now yours not only in the ordinary way of life but as a fellow-believer in the Lord. You look on me as your partner, don't you? Well, Onesimus is my representative; give him the welcome you would give to me. Has he done you any wrong? Does he owe you something? Never mind; put that down on my account. Here is my I.O.U., written with my own hand. "I will make it good. *Signed: Paul.*"

(I scarcely need to remind you, of course, of the debt that you owe me; it is to me that you owe your very life!)

Yes, my dear brother, give me this pleasure as a fellow-Christian. Refresh my heart in the name of Christ, to whom we both belong.

I write like this because I have every confidence in your obedience; I know you will do more than I say. And, by the way, please get the guest-room ready for me; I hope I shall soon be restored to you, thanks to your prayers.

#### IV. FINAL GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION (vv. 23-25)

Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings; so do my fellow-workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.