

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

Philemon

⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. ¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— ¹⁶ 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 fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.

What is the back story to this letter to Philemon?

V8 what could he order Onesimus to do? What does he choose not to?

V9-10 what kind of language does Paul use towards Philemon and Onesimus? What does it say about the relationship?

V13 Why does he choose to send him back when he could have kept him?

V14-15 what is Paul's real goal here?

What do you think about Paul not denouncing slavery?

Does he passively condone slavery by sending Onesimus back?

V16 what kind of a relationship does Paul propose here between Philemon and Onesimus?

V18 what is Paul modelling here to us in this passage?

When is forgiveness hardest for us? Is there anything we should not forgive?