



REV. D. THOMAS PORTER, PH.D.

3422 Fallview Court ♦ Land O' Lakes, FL 34639
<https://DThomasPorter.com/BibleStudies/NTS602>

DrTom@PorterHouse.info
813.728.5713^{Cell}

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Timothy
Titus
Philemon

D. Thomas Porter

LESSON NOTES

PHILEMON <> OVERVIEW

Preparation for Studying Paul's Letter to Philemon

Background

What we call "Philemon," was probably written with Paul's letter to the church at Colosse about 60AD. The letter was probably carried by Onaysimon and Tychicus. Ironically, Onaysimon was a major topic of the letter he was carrying. Philemon (fi-lay'-mon) was apparently written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (it could have also been from Ephesus).

Philemon was a gentile Christ follower in Colosse who happened to own slaves. Onaysimon had apparently stolen (verse 18) from him (see also Titus 2:9-10).¹⁷ Stealing was one thing, but running away was potentially a capital offense in Roman culture. Onaysimon became a follower of the Christ through Paul's mentoring, but now he was willing to return to Philemon. Paul's human, personal and passionate letter asks that Onaysimon be accepted as brother in the Christ (verse 16).

Paul shows his stripes as a well-educated citizen; he addresses Philemon, both with tact and humor—Paul apparently loved dad jokes, noting Onaysimon once was useless, now he is Onaysimon ("useful") useful again. His education in rhetoric shines here as well:

1. Build rapport,
2. Persuade intellectually by using logic and evidence,
3. Evoke the emotions inherent in the person and situation, and
4. Call for a decision or action.



¹⁷"Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive."

TEACHING FAITH BY LOVING THE “LESS THAN” (PHILEMON)

Philemon: 1-11. *Loving Foundations*. Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, we write to you, Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker [συνεργῶ]. We also write to Apphia, our sister, and Archippus our fellow soldier [συστρατιώτη, sus-tra-ti-ó-tay, "fellow soldier;" [4961](#)], and the church who meets in your home—

Mercy to you and peace [εἰρηνῆ]¹⁸ from our Father God and Lord Jesus the Christ.

I always thank the God of me when I pray; I hear about your ἀγαπῆν and your πιστον toward the Lord Jesus, to say nothing of your ἀγαπῆν for all the believers [ἀγιους, hah-gi-ous, "set apart by (or for) God, holy, sacred;" [40](#)].

I also pray that as you are active in sharing your faith, you will have a full understanding of all the great things we have ἐν the Christ.

Your love has given me great joy, encouraging joy, because you my brother have given rest [see Matthew 11:28-30¹⁹; [373](#)] to the raison d'être of the set apart believers [i.e., those who are ἀγιους, hah-gi-ous, "set apart by (or for) God, holy, sacred;" [40](#)].

Since we are both ἐν the Christ, and that being said, I could order you to do what you should—but I ask you on the basis of love. I am an old man and prisoner of Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my son [τεκνου, child] Onaysimon who became my son [τεκνου, child] while I was in chains. He was useless to you when he was here, but now he has become both to you and me.

- Q Why does sharing one's faith facilitate a more complete understanding of the riches we have in the Christ?
- Q What does it mean to "refresh the raison d'être of those set apart believers?" (verse 7)
- Q Why didn't Paul order Philemon to accept Onaysimon back?

PHILEMON: 1-11

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, ²to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that [that is not there; should be "who"] meets in your home—

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the ["the" is not there] Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

⁶I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

⁷Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

⁸Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—¹⁰I appeal to you for my son Onesimus [actually, Ονησιμων, on-ay-si-mon, "useful;" [3682](#)], who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹⁸See https://DThomasPorter.com/BibleStudies/Peace_in_The_Bible.pdf for a deeper understanding of "peace" in Scripture.

¹⁹"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." –NIV

Philemon: 12-25. Please Accept Onaysimon. So? I am sending my very dear Onaysimon back to you. I would have loved to keep him here with me so he could take your place helping me share the gospel while I am in chains. But, I did not want to do anything without your approval—any favor you do will be, hopefully, spontaneous and not forced.

Perhaps he was separated was so you could have him back for good—no longer a slave, better than a slave—actually a dear brother. While he is dear to me, he is even dearer to you—both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

So, if you think of me as your partner, welcome him back as you would welcome me. If he has done something wrong, or owes you something—charge it to me.

Just for the record, I am writing this in my own handwriting—I will pay it back; that's my promise. Remember, you owe me also: your very self. I trust you have some benefit by my relationship to you in the Lord—refresh my *raison d'être* in the Christ. As I am confident in your obedience, I am writing confident that you will do even more than I ask.

Also—get a guest room ready for me; I hope to be restored to you, thus answering your prayers. And, Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, says hello. So does Mark, Aristarchus, Demans and Luke—my fellow workers.

May the mercy gift of the Lord Jesus the Christ be with your spirit!

- Q Why was Paul sending Onaysimon back to Philemon, especially given how dear and useful he was to Paul?
- Q Was it Paul's responsibility to pay for any breach of contract by Onaysimon? How did he reinforce this offer rhetorically?
- Q What advice regarding how to deal with church relations challenges would you glean from Paul's letter to Philemon?

PHILEMON: 12-25

I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³I 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. ¹⁴But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. ¹⁵Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—⁶no 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 man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. ¹⁸If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. ¹⁹I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

²²And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. ²³Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. ²⁴And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.