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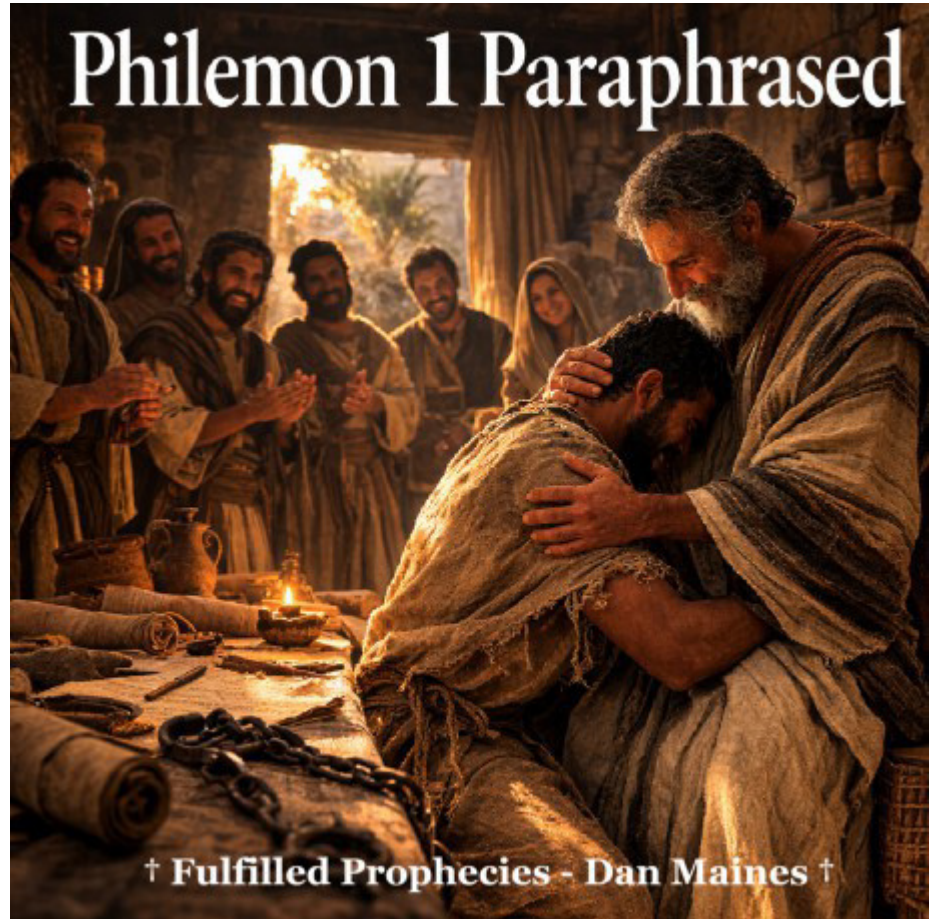
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Philemon 1 Paraphrased



By Dan Maines

Philemon 1 Paraphrased

Introduction

† This short letter from Paul shows the heart of the gospel working in real life. It's not a theological argument, it's a personal appeal about forgiveness, reconciliation, and seeing a brother in Christ instead of a slave.

† The situation involves Onesimus, a runaway slave who came to faith while Paul was imprisoned. Instead of forcing authority, Paul appeals to love and brotherhood.

† Early Christians understood this letter as a living example of the transforming power of Christ in everyday relationships.

Philemon 1:1

Paul, a prisoner because of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, writing to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow worker.

† Paul identifies himself as a prisoner for Christ, showing that his suffering came from preaching the gospel (Ephesians 3:1).

† Philemon was a respected believer who supported the church and worked alongside the apostles (Colossians 4:9).

† Irenaeus noted that the apostles often addressed believers as fellow workers because the gospel mission belonged to the whole church.

Philemon 1:2

Also to Apphia our sister, Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church that gathers in your house.

† Early Christians commonly met in homes because formal church buildings didn't yet exist (Romans 16:5).

† Archippus is described as a fellow soldier, showing the spiritual battle believers faced while spreading the gospel (2 Timothy 2:3).

† Clement of Alexandria wrote that house churches were the earliest gathering places where believers learned and practiced the teachings of Christ.

Philemon 1:3

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

† Grace and peace summarize the blessings of the gospel, God's favor and the reconciliation that comes through Christ (Romans 5:1).

† This greeting appears in many apostolic letters and reflects

the unity between the Father and the Son in salvation.

† Eusebius wrote that the apostles consistently opened letters this way to remind believers of the source of their spiritual life.

Philemon 1:4

I always thank my God when I remember you in my prayers.

† Paul regularly prayed for believers and gave thanks for their faith and love (Philippians 1:3).

† Prayer was a central part of the early Christian life and leadership among the apostles.

† Tertullian described how early Christians prayed continually for one another as members of one body.

Philemon 1:5

Because I hear about your love and faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.

† True faith in Christ always shows itself in love toward other believers (1 John 3:14).

† Philemon's reputation for love was well known among the churches.

† Irenaeus wrote that the mark of genuine Christianity was love for the brethren.

Philemon 1:6

I pray that the sharing of your faith will become effective as you fully recognize every good thing that is in us because of Christ.

† The gospel grows stronger when believers understand the blessings they have in Christ (Colossians 2:2-3).

† Sharing faith isn't just speaking, it's living in a way that reveals Christ through love and unity.

† Clement of Alexandria taught that knowledge of Christ should always produce visible goodness in believers.

Philemon 1:7

I have received great joy and encouragement because of your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

† Refreshing the hearts of others refers to strengthening and encouraging fellow believers (2 Corinthians 7:13).

† Hospitality and kindness were essential traits in early Christian communities.

† Eusebius recorded that believers were known for caring for one another during persecution and hardship.

Philemon 1:8

Because of this, even though I could be bold in Christ and command you to do what is proper,

† Paul had apostolic authority, but he chose not to use it in a commanding way here.

† This shows the gospel works through love rather than coercion.

† Tertullian wrote that Christian leaders often appealed to conscience rather than exercising authority.

Philemon 1:9

Instead, because of love I appeal to you, I, Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

† Paul appeals based on love, reflecting the character of Christ Himself (John 13:34).

† Calling himself an old man and prisoner emphasizes humility and sacrifice for the gospel.

† Irenaeus described Paul as an example of apostolic endurance and compassion.

Philemon 1:10

I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whose father I became

while I was in chains.

† Onesimus came to faith while Paul was imprisoned, making Paul his spiritual father (1 Corinthians 4:15).

† This shows how the gospel continued spreading even during persecution.

† Eusebius wrote that many people were converted through the witness of imprisoned Christians.

Philemon 1:11

Formerly he was useless to you, but now he's useful both to you and to me.

† Onesimus means useful, and Paul uses the name to show the transformation Christ brought.

† Conversion changes a person's life and character (2 Corinthians 5:17).

† Clement of Alexandria taught that the gospel restores people to their true purpose.

Philemon 1:12

I'm sending him back to you, and with him I send my own heart.

† Paul deeply cared for Onesimus and trusted Philemon to receive him kindly.

† This shows the personal bond created within the body of Christ.

† Early Christian writers often emphasized the deep brotherhood formed through faith.

Philemon 1:13

I wanted to keep him with me so he could serve me on your behalf while I'm imprisoned for the gospel.

† Onesimus had become a valuable helper during Paul's imprisonment.

† Service to fellow believers was considered service to Christ

Himself (Matthew 25:40).

† Eusebius recorded many believers who assisted imprisoned Christians during Roman persecution.

Philemon 1:14

But I didn't want to do anything without your consent, so your kindness would not be forced but voluntary.

† Christian love must come from the heart, not compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7).

† Paul respected Philemon's decision and freedom.

† Tertullian wrote that Christian generosity should always be willing, never forced.

Philemon 1:15

Perhaps he was separated from you for a while so that you would receive him back forever.

† Paul suggests that God may have worked through the situation to bring about a greater purpose.

† God often turns difficult circumstances into blessings (Romans 8:28).

† Early Christians believed God's providence worked even through hardship.

Philemon 1:16

No longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me, and even more to you both in the flesh and in the Lord.

† The gospel transforms social relationships by placing believers on equal footing as brothers.

† This passage shows the spiritual equality found in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

† Irenaeus wrote that in Christ believers become one family regardless of status.

Philemon 1:17

So if you consider me your partner, receive him the same way you would receive me.

† Paul identifies with Onesimus and asks Philemon to welcome him with honor.

† This reflects the way Christ receives believers through grace (Romans 15:7).

† Clement of Alexandria taught that welcoming believers is welcoming Christ.

Philemon 1:18

If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

† Paul offers to take responsibility for any debt, reflecting the principle of substitution.

† This mirrors how Christ bore the debt of sin for believers (Colossians 2:13-14).

† Early writers saw this as a picture of the gospel itself.

Philemon 1:19

I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I'll repay it, not to mention that you owe me your own self as well.

† Paul personally guarantees repayment, showing sincerity.

† Philemon likely came to faith through Paul's ministry.

† Eusebius recorded that many early believers owed their conversion to apostolic preaching.

Philemon 1:20

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

† Paul returns to the idea of refreshing the hearts of believers through love.

† Forgiveness and reconciliation strengthen the body of Christ.

† Tertullian wrote that unity among believers was the greatest testimony of Christianity.

Philemon 1:21

Confident in your obedience, I'm writing to you knowing you'll do even more than I ask.

† Paul expresses trust that Philemon will respond with generosity and grace.

† True obedience to Christ produces actions that go beyond the minimum requirement.

† Early church writers praised believers who willingly showed mercy and kindness.

Philemon 1:22

At the same time prepare a guest room for me, because I hope I'll be restored to you through your prayers.

† Paul expected prayer to play a role in his possible release.

† Prayer for imprisoned believers was common in the early church (Acts 12:5).

† Eusebius wrote that believers constantly prayed for leaders suffering for the gospel.

Philemon 1:23

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you.

† Epaphras was another faithful worker connected to the church at Colossae (Colossians 1:7).

† The phrase fellow prisoner may refer to sharing imprisonment or suffering for the gospel.

† Early Christian writings frequently mention co-laborers who endured persecution together.

Philemon 1:24

So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

† These names show the network of early Christian leaders working together.

† Luke later wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

† Eusebius preserved many records about these early missionaries and their ministries.

Philemon 1:25

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

† The letter closes with a blessing centered on Christ's grace.

† Grace remains the foundation of the Christian life and fellowship.

† Irenaeus taught that believers live continually under the grace given through Jesus Christ.

Historical References

† Irenaeus explained that the apostles used real life situations like this to demonstrate how the gospel changes relationships and restores people into one family.

† Clement of Alexandria taught that Christian brotherhood removes the divisions created by social status.

† Eusebius recorded that the early church saw Onesimus as an example of the transforming power of the gospel.

How It Applies To Us Today

† The gospel still transforms lives just as it did for Onesimus.

† Forgiveness and reconciliation remain central to the Christian life.

† We are called to treat fellow believers as brothers and sisters, not according to status or background.

† The unity of believers continues to be one of the strongest testimonies of the truth of Christ.

Q & A Appendix

Q Why did Paul appeal instead of command Philemon?

A Paul chose love over authority because the gospel works through willing obedience and compassion (John 13:34-35).

Q Why is Onesimus important in this letter?

A His conversion shows how Christ transforms people and turns broken situations into restored relationships (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Q What does this letter reveal about early Christian communities?

A Believers treated one another as family and gathered in homes to worship and serve together (Romans 16:5).

Q Why did Paul offer to repay Onesimus' debt?

A It reflects the principle of bearing another person's burden and mirrors Christ taking the debt of sin for believers (Colossians 2:13-14).

Q What is the main message of Philemon?

A The gospel changes hearts and relationships, turning division into brotherhood in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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† Philemon 1

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

† Clement of Alexandria, Stromata

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