

Sermon: No Longer as a Slave; delivered on August 23, 2020,
by **Josh Moody**, senior pastor,

Bible text explored: Philemon

¹Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ²and Apphia our sister and
Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ.

⁴I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers,
⁵because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the
Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶and I pray that the sharing of your faith
may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is
in us for the sake of Christ. ⁷For I have derived much joy and comfort
from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been
refreshed through you.

⁸Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to
do what is required, ⁹yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I,
Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰I appeal to
you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.
¹¹(Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you
and to me.) ¹²I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³I
would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve
me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴but I
preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness
might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵For this perhaps is
why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back
forever, ¹⁶no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a
beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in
the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would
receive me. ¹⁸If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge
that to my account. ¹⁹I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay
it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰Yes, brother,
I want 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 say. ²²At the same time, prepare a guest room for
me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given
to you.

²³Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to
you, ²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow
workers.

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

Review and application:

1. Start by establishing the background for this shortest and most
personal letter of Paul retained in the New Testament:
How (*verses 1 and 8*) does Paul describe himself to Philemon?
For what (*verses 1-2, 5, 7*) does Paul commend his “fellow worker”
Philemon?
What clues (*verses 15, 18, 10-12*) are included about Onesimus?

2. To make his faith “become effective,” what selfless “good thing” (*verse 6*) would need to be performed by . . .
 - . . . Paul (*in verses 12-13*)?
 - . . . Onesimus (*in verse 15*)?
 - . . . Philemon (*in verses 14, 17*)?
3. Why (*verses 7, 20, 9*) did Paul prefer appealing to Philemon as a brother, rather than commanding as an apostle (*verses 8, 14, 17*)?

What internal changes was Paul anticipating that a command was unlikely to produce? . . .

 - . . . for Onesimus (*verse 11*):
 - . . . for Philemon (*verses 16, 21*)

The English Standard Version translates the Greek doulos (verse 16) as “bondservant” rather than “slave” to alert contemporary readers that Roman slavery differed markedly from the antebellum form in the West.

4. What (*verse 16*) was the “in the Lord” position that Paul explained? (*See 1 Corinthians 7:20-24.*)

But what hint of an extended “in the flesh” result does Paul dangle? And why did inclusion of this letter in the canon of Scripture, according to biblical scholar F. F. Bruce, create an “atmosphere in which the institution of slavery [could] only wilt and die”?

5. Two dangers for the church are 1) allowing cultural captivity to sidetrack us from proclaiming the gospel, and 2) adopting a fortress mentality of privatized piety unconcerned about the world going to hell. How is our faith and love empowering us to avoid these traps?

How are the hearts of the saints being refreshed during this interval of pandemic and political disruption?

How else could we better relate to each other as brothers and sisters?