

Study 2

Read Philemon 1:11-16

I. Paul sends Onesimus back (11-13)

Discussion Questions

- Why was Onesimus useless to Philemon?
- When does “formerly” refer to?
- What had happened?
- Why was Paul sending Onesimus back?
- What can you learn from verse 12 about Paul’s attitude toward him?
- What does it mean to forgive someone?
- What does Paul personally desire to do (13)?

Reflect – What do we learn from Onesimus about real repentance?

Application – Repentance results in a change of attitude and behavior. Onesimus was running from Philemon. Now he was going back to Philemon. We cannot say we are repenting if we refuse to face our mistakes, confess, and seek reconciliation.

Application – Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there someone who you refuse to receive their call, visit, gift, or letter? One important aspect of forgiveness is to open the lines of communication. Welcome the person. Hear them out. Or perhaps it is you who needs to take the initiative to reach out and seek reconciliation like Onesimus did.

II. Onesimus is a changed man (14-16)

Discussion Questions

- Why didn’t Paul just keep Onesimus with him since that is what he hoped for?

- What problems might result if Paul just assumed it was okay with Philemon for Onesimus to stay?
- What are the dangers of making assumptions?
- What do we learn from Paul about communication? About solving problems?
- What principles can we learn from Paul here that we can apply to our lives today?
- What does the phrase mean, “that you may gain him back forever?”
- What does verse 16 show us about Onesimus’ status and value as a believer?
- How can Onesimus’ story encourage people in lower socio-economic tiers today?
- How was Onesimus “more” to Philemon now than before?
- What can you learn from this story about forgiveness and restoration?
- How does being in Christ change the way we interact with people from every level of society? Criminals? Outcasts? The elite?

Application – Every person who has authority over others can learn a valuable lesson from Paul. We are not to abuse our authority. Jesus said that we should not “rule over” others but instead serve them. Being a leader does not mean that we have the right to boss people around. And church leaders should not overstep that boundary and take charge of members’ personal lives. Parents should be humble and serve their children. Husbands should not use their role as head to domineer over their wives.

Application – You may also be facing strife in a relationship. Perhaps you feel that you have been mistreated. Maybe the unfair treatment is causing resentment to build up within you. Attack that resentment with the promise of God in Romans 8:28. Be assured that God wants to use even this trial for good in your life. It can be an opportunity for transformation. You can draw close to Christ and depend on Him. Maybe one day you will look back and see all of the good that came about because of the trial.