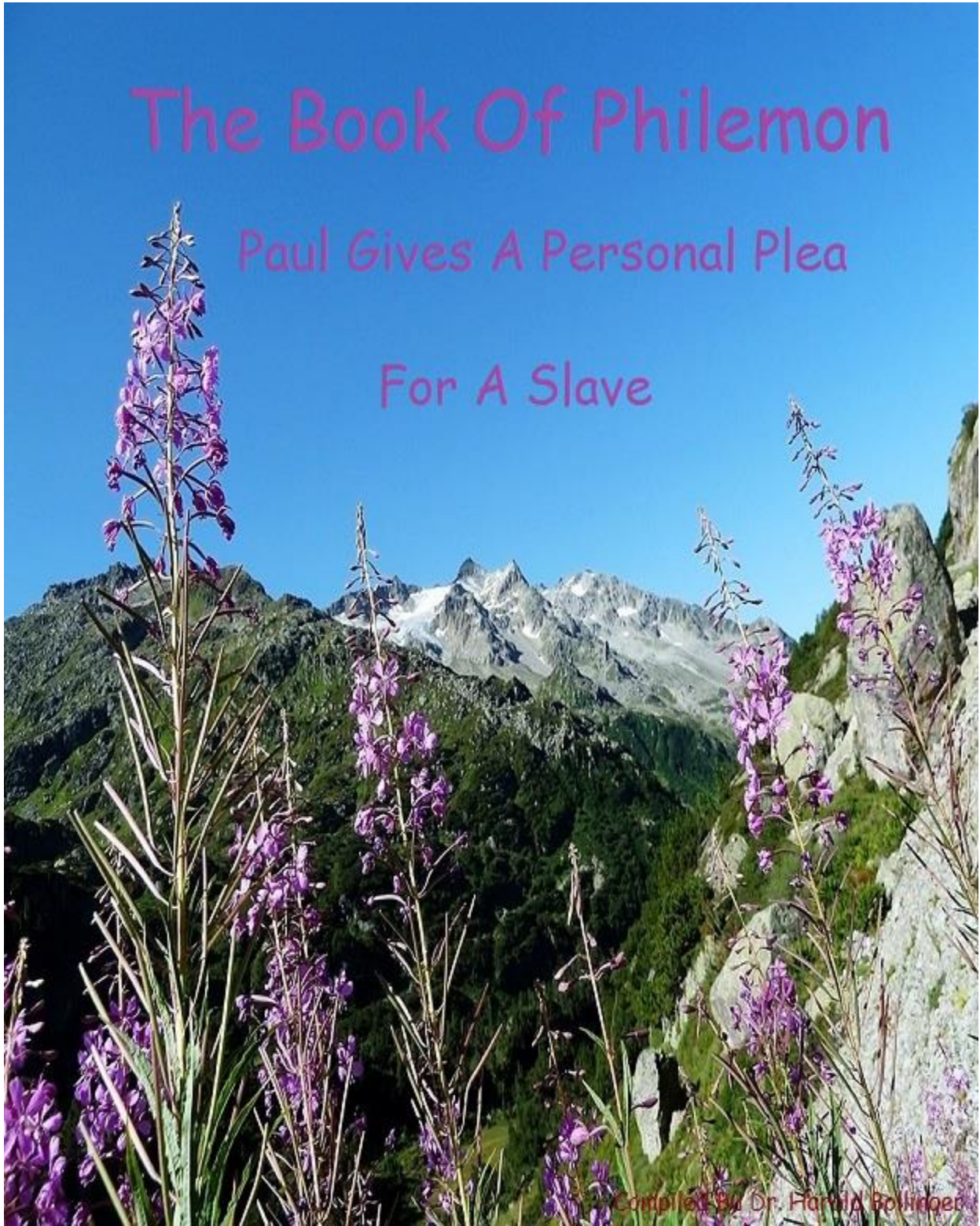


The Book Of Philemon

Paul Gives A Personal Plea

For A Slave



Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

Philemon

OVERVIEW:

Christ came as the great wall remover, tearing down the sin partition that separates us from God and blasting the barriers that keep us from each other. His death and resurrection opened the way to eternal life to bring all who believe into the family of God (see Ephes. 2:14-18).

Roman, Greek, and Jewish cultures were littered with barriers, as society assigned people to classes and expected them to stay in their place—men and women, slave and free, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, pious and pagan. But with the message of Christ, the walls came down, and Paul could declare, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11).

This life-changing truth forms the backdrop for the letter to Philemon. One of three personal letters in the Bible, the letter to Philemon is Paul’s personal plea for a slave. Onesimus “belonged” to Philemon, a member of the Colossian church and Paul’s friend. But Onesimus, the slave, had stolen from his master and run away. He ran to Rome where he met Paul, and there he responded to the Good News and came to faith in Christ (Philemon 1:10). So Paul writes to Philemon and reintroduces Onesimus to him, explaining that he is sending him back, not just as a slave but as a brother (Philemon 1:11-12, 16). Tactfully he asks Philemon to accept and forgive his brother (Philemon 1:10, 14-15, 20). The barriers of the past and the new ones erected by Onesimus’s desertion and theft should divide them no longer—they are one in Christ.

This small book is a masterpiece of grace and tact and a profound demonstration of the power of Christ and of true Christian fellowship in action. What barriers are in your home, neighborhood, and church? What separates you from fellow believers—race? status? wealth? education? personality? As with Philemon, God calls you to seek unity, breaking down those walls and embracing your brothers and sisters in Christ.

THE BLUEPRINT

Paul pleads on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave. Paul's intercession for him illustrates what Christ has done for us. As Paul interceded for a slave, so Christ intercedes for us, slaves to sin. As Onesimus was reconciled to Philemon, so we are reconciled to God through Christ. As Paul offered to pay the debts of a slave, so Christ paid our debt of sin. Like Onesimus, we must return to God our Master and serve him.

1. Paul's appreciation of Philemon (Philemon 1:1-7)

This letter is from Paul, in prison for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy.

It is written to Philemon, our much loved co-worker, [2] and to our sister Apphia and to Archippus, a fellow soldier of the cross. I am also writing to the church that meets in your house.

[3] May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

[4] I always thank God when I pray for you, Philemon, [5] because I keep hearing of your trust in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. [6] You are generous because of your faith. And I am praying that you will really put your generosity to work, for in so doing you will come to an understanding of all the good things we can do for Christ. [7] I myself have gained much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because your kindness has so often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

2. Paul's appeal for Onesimus (Philemon 1:8-25)

That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do, [9] but because of our love, I prefer just to ask you. So take this as a request from your friend Paul, an old man, now in prison for the sake of Christ Jesus.

[10] My plea is that you show kindness to Onesimus. I think of him as my own son because he became a believer as a result of my ministry here in prison. [11] Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. [12] I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.

[13] I really wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. [14] But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. And I didn't want you to help because you were forced to do it but because you wanted to. [15] Perhaps you could think of it this way: Onesimus ran away for a little while so you could have him back forever. [16] He is no longer just a slave; he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a slave and as a brother in the Lord.

[17] So if you consider me your partner, give him the same welcome you would give me if I were coming. [18] If he has harmed you in any way or stolen anything from you, charge me for it. [19] I, Paul, write this in my own handwriting: "I will repay it." And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul!

[20] Yes, dear brother, please do me this favor for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ. [21] I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!

[22] Please keep a guest room ready for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon.

[23] Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. [24] So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers.

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

MEGATHEMES

THEME: Forgiveness

EXPLANATION:

Philemon was Paul's friend and the legal owner of the slave, Onesimus. Paul asked him not to punish Onesimus, but to forgive and restore him as a new Christian brother.

IMPORTANCE:

Christian relationships must be full of forgiveness and acceptance. Can you forgive those who have wronged you?

THEME: Barriers

EXPLANATION:

Slavery was widespread in the Roman Empire, but no one is lost to God or beyond his love. Slavery was a barrier between people, but Christian love and fellowship are to overcome such barriers.

IMPORTANCE:

In Christ we are one family. No walls of racial, economic or political differences should separate us. Let Christ work through you to remove barriers between Christian brothers and sisters.

THEME: Respect

EXPLANATION:

Paul was a friend of both Philemon and Onesimus. He had the authority as an apostle to tell Philemon what to do. Yet Paul chose to appeal to his friend in Christian love rather than to order him what to do.

IMPORTANCE:

Tactful persuasion accomplishes a great deal more than commands when dealing with people. Remember to exhibit courtesy and respect in your relationships.

An invitation is given to open your heart's door.

Rev. 3:20

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

