

¹⁻³ I, Paul, am a prisoner for the sake of Christ, here with my brother Timothy. I write this letter to you, Philemon, my good friend and companion in this work—also to our sister Apphia, to Archippus, a real trooper, and to the church that meets in your house. God’s best to you! Christ’s blessings on you!

⁴⁻⁷ Every time your name comes up in my prayers, I say, “Oh, thank you, God!” I keep hearing of the love and faith you have for the Master Jesus, which brims over to other believers. And I keep praying that this faith we hold in common keeps showing up in the good things we do, and that people recognize Christ in all of it. Friend, you have no idea how good your love makes me feel, doubly so when I see your hospitality to fellow believers.

To Call the Slave Your Friend

⁸⁻⁹ In line with all this I have a favor to ask of you. As Christ’s ambassador and now a prisoner for him, I wouldn’t hesitate to command this if I thought it necessary, but I’d rather make it a personal request.

¹⁰⁻¹⁴ While here in jail, I’ve fathered a child, so to speak. And here he is, hand-carrying this letter—Onesimus! He was useless to you before; now he’s useful to both of us. I’m sending him back to you, but it feels like I’m cutting off my right arm in doing so. I wanted in the worst way to keep him here as your stand-in to help out while I’m in jail for the Message. But I didn’t want to do anything behind your back, make you do a good deed that you hadn’t willingly agreed to.

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ Maybe it’s all for the best that you lost him for a while. You’re getting him back now for good—and no mere slave this time, but a true Christian brother! That’s what he was to me—he’ll be even more than that to you.

¹⁷⁻²⁰ So if you still consider me a comrade-in-arms, welcome him back as you would me. If he damaged anything or owes you anything, chalk it up to my account. This is my personal signature—Paul—and I stand behind it. (I don’t need to remind you, do I, that you owe your very life to me?) Do me this big favor, friend. You’ll be doing it for Christ, but it will also do my heart good.

²¹⁻²² I know you well enough to know you will. You'll probably go far beyond what I've written. And by the way, get a room ready for me. Because of your prayers, I fully expect to be your guest again.

²³⁻²⁵ Epaphras, my cellmate in the cause of Christ, says hello. Also, my coworkers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. All the best to you from the Master, Jesus Christ!