

<p><b>A</b></p>	<p><b><u>Sending Onesimus Back to Philemon</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Christ, Paul “have the full right in Christ to order” and plead with Philemon for these reasons: (1) What he asks is “proper” according to Christ’s teachings; (2) Paul is Philemon’s spiritual teacher and mentor; and (3) His rank as an Apostle.</li> <li>However, Paul doesn’t wish to convince Philemon by pulling his rank, he rather “urge(s) ... out of love”. This reflects Paul’s unique and dignified sentiments.</li> <li>“Onesimus” means “useful”. He has left Philemon in disobedience and become useless. However, after his conversion and reconciliation with his master, he becomes “useful” again. In addition, the pronunciations of “useless” (achreston) and “useful” (euchreston) are similar to “not-Christ-ed” and “well-Christ-ed”, which mean, with Christ and without Christ. Paul called the converted Onesimus “my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become in my imprisonment” (1:10) =&gt; Priest = spiritual father.</li> <li>“I am sending him, that is my own heart, back to you” – Paul skilfully phrases it as if Philemon actually sent Onesimus as a help in his imprisonment. While expressing his wishes, he is careful to state that he wants Philemon consent so that that good he does might not be forced but voluntary. “Voluntary” translates into “kata hekousion”, which carries a significant connotation of “free-will offering”.</li> <li>This is the key theme of the entire letter; it’s Paul’s reason for writing this letter. This can be seen in the letter’s Chiastic Structure. (Chiastic is a structure that uses verbal parallel; the main focus is often found in the middle. For instance, “A B C B A” = focus is “C”.</li> </ul>	<p>Phm 1:8-14</p> <p>1:8, CCSS</p> <p>1:9, CCSS 1Cor 9:12-23</p> <p>1:10-11, CCSS</p> <p>1Cor 4:15</p> <p>1:12-14, CCSS</p> <p>Lv 7:16; 23:38 SN1</p> <p>Ref. CCSS 31-32</p>
<p><b>B</b></p>	<p><b><u>The Request</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>According to the slavery law, the action of Onesimus is sufficient to put him to death. However his reason for leaving may not be simply running away and never to return, but to seek the mediation of Philemon’s mentor, so that he and his master may reconcile. Therefore, Paul says, “He was away from you for a while”. With Onesimus’ conversion, possibly according to God’s</li> </ul>	<p>1:15-20</p> <p>1:15-17, CSB</p>

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	<p>mysterious plan, “you might have him back forever”. Since both have been converted and in Christ, both have become children of God, they have also become brothers forever.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Though Paul never directly criticizes the slavery system, he has already broken the taboo of the law dictating the master-slave relationship. To Paul, baptism into Christ creates an identity that transcends all forms of social and cultural discrimination. Therefore, he asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus “as you would me”. Following the teachings of Paul and the Apostles, the Church continues to hold true that in the Lord, everyone has dignity and deserved to be love.</li> <li>• “And if he has done you any injustice or owes you anything, charge it to me.” If Philemon agrees to Paul’s request, Paul will pay for all the damages. However, Paul also reminds Philemon that “May I not tell you that you owe me your very self”, that is, Paul’s mentorship of Philemon’s spiritual growth. In other words, Paul believes that Philemon would comply.</li> </ul>	<p>CCSS, Rm 8:14-17 Gal 3:28</p> <p>Jn 13:34-35 SN2</p> <p>1:18-20, CCSS, CSB</p>
<p><b>C</b></p>	<p><b><u>Greetings and Benediction</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “With trust in your compliance I write to you” – Paul has expressed his hope that Philemon’s decision may be “voluntary” (1:14), however, he has hope that his obedience is, not only to him, Paul, but to the larger community in Christ and to the mutual love that this new family entails.</li> <li>• This “compliance” requires Philemon to do something: “prepare a guest room for me”, implying that Paul will be freed shortly, that when he visits Philemon, he can find out whether Philemon has complied.</li> <li>• The conclusion contains five names, also mentioned in Colossians; it is believed that both letters were written around the same time. “Epaphras” is described as Paul’s “fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus”, the Greek word conveys the meaning that both, as described in Is 61:1, will be the prisoners liberated by the Messiah in His second coming.</li> </ul>	<p>1:21-25</p> <p>1:21-22, CCSS</p> <p>CCSS p 55, CSB</p> <p>1:23-25, CCSS</p> <p>Lk 4:18</p>

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<b>D</b>	<p><u>Reflection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contrary to the North American culture of individualism and liberty, the Christian culture values community. The Christian community, the Church, is a grand family. Onesimus' baptism is not only his personal business but it also affects Paul, Philemon and the Church. In Christ, members are uniquely connected to each other as they all belong to one body. In this collective, each member understands and cares for each other. Such is true freedom.</li> </ul>	<p>CCSS p 59</p> <p>SN3</p>
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**SPECIAL NOTES:**

1. "Not according to compulsion but according to free will"(1:14)  
 God does not tyrannize but rules; he does not coerce but encourages. He wishes that those under him yield themselves willingly to his direction, so that one may do good not out of compulsion but out of his free will. This is what Paul with understanding was saying to Philemon concerning Onesimus (Origen, from CCSS p.56).
2. The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason - selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian - lead to the *enslavement of human beings*, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave "no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, . . . both in the flesh and in the Lord" (Eph 16). (CCC 2414)
3. "Only the freedom which submits to the Truth leads the human person to his true good. Freedom then is rooted in the truth about man, and it is ultimately directed towards communion" (JPPII, The Splendor of Truth, 84, 86).

You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32).

"In the house of the Lord, slavery is free." – St. Augustine