

One Chapter Wonders: Philemon

Introduction to this Bible study (Pathways course description):

Singers or musical groups who have recorded only one recognizable song in their career are sometimes referred to as “one hit wonders.” In the Bible we might adjust and apply that phrase to those books of Scripture that consist of only a single chapter. There are five of them: Obadiah in the Old Testament, and Philemon, 2nd John, 3rd John, and Jude in the New Testament. While they may be short in length, like all of God’s Word, they are long in truth, and there is much we can learn from them. In this 6-week Bible study we will examine what God has to teach us through each of these “One Chapter Wonders.”

General Overview

- Philemon: Who? What? When? Where?
- *The Bible Project*

The Backstory

- Portrait of Paul
- One of the four “prison epistles” or “captivity letters”
- Facts concerning Philemon
 - Appears to be a member at Colosse
 - *Colossians 4:7-9*
 - Devout believer with an equally devout and engaged Christian family
 - Appears to be a man of some means
 - Appears to owe his conversion (humanly speaking) to Paul
- Facts concerning Onesimus
 - Relationship to Philemon
 - Offence against Philemon
 - Speculation on how he ended up in Rome and with Paul

A Closer Look: Verse by Verse Exposition

¹ Paul, a **prisoner** of Christ Jesus, and **Timothy** our brother,

To **Philemon** our **dear friend** and **fellow worker**—² also to **Apphia** our **sister** and **Archippus** our **fellow soldier**—and to the **church** that meets **in your home**:

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

Thanksgiving and Prayer

⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about **your love** for all his holy people and **your faith** in the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that **your partnership with us in the faith** may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing **we share** for the sake of Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me **great joy and encouragement**, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

⁸ Therefore, although in Christ **I could be bold and order you** to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I prefer to **appeal to you on the basis of love**. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a **prisoner** of Christ Jesus—¹⁰ that I appeal to you for **my son Onesimus**, who **became my son** while I was **in chains**. ¹¹ **Formerly** he was **useless** to you, but **now** he has become **useful** both to you and to me.

¹² I am sending him—who is **my very heart**—back to you. ¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while **I am in chains** for the gospel. ¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. ¹⁵ Perhaps **the reason** he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—¹⁶ **no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.**

¹⁷ So if you consider me a **partner**, welcome him **as you would welcome me**. ¹⁸ If he has **done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me**. ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this **with my own hand**. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. ²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ **Confident of your obedience**, I write to **you**, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

²² And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to **you** in answer to your prayers.

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

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

Romans 15:4: What is God Teaching Us Through This One Chapter Wonder?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Related Issues, Applications and Discussion Items

1. *What is your first and/or general impression of Philemon? When and under what personal conditions could you see yourself turning to it?*
2. *The general subjects of forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration, and how they all tie in with each other in the life of the Christian.*
3. *Faith in Christ is the great “equalizer” that obliterates all social and class distinctions. How does that work in an employer-employee situation?*
4. *Onesimus was a slave and Philemon was a slave owner. Cf Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3:22; 4:1, 1 Peter 2:18, 1 Timothy 6:1, Titus 2:9. What position does the Bible take on the societal issue of slavery?*

Big Picture Portrait of Paul

- 1. Youth and young manhood**
- 2. Conversion**
- 3. After conversion**
- 4. First missionary journey**
- 5. Second missionary journey**
- 6. Third missionary journey**
- 7. In Jerusalem and Caesarea**
- 8. Voyage to Rome**
- 9. Roman imprisonment 1**
- 10. Roman imprisonment 2**