

## Set Free to be a Slave of Jesus Christ

**Colossians 4:7** As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information.

**Colossians 4:8** For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;

**Colossians 4:9** and with him Onesimus, ...

**Onesimus.** A runaway slave whose owner is a member of the church of Colossae. Let's just read through the letter to Philemon. Philemon should be listed as one of the prison epistles along with Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. 'Higher Criticism' rejects this epistle as being from Paul on the main grounds that it contains no deep doctrines as all his other letters contain. But this epistle is part of the divinely inspired Word of God. It teaches us some wonderful points on the impact of spiritual love, leading of the Holy Spirit. It also teaches some interesting points on giving.

Philemon is part of the Colossian local church and part of the predicament they must deal with.

The book is made up of just 25 verses and is easily divided into 5 parts:

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***Outline of the book of Philemon***

Verses 1-3     The Salutation

Verses 4-7     The spiritual maturity of Philemon. He was a slave owner and a mature believer in Jesus Christ. Being mature means that he knew and understood a great deal of Bible doctrine.

Verses 8-12    The purpose of the letter. It deals with the social problem of slavery: how not to deal with it and how to deal with it as Christians.

Verses 13-15   The spiritual value of the slave Onesimus.

Verses 16-25   The crisis of Grace.

***Salutation (verses 1-3)***

**Philemon 1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus,  
and Timothy our brother,  
To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow  
worker,**

**Philemon 2 and to Apphia our sister,  
(Philemon's wife) and to Archippus our fellow  
soldier, (apparently he is the pastor-teacher in  
Laodecia) and to the church in your house:  
(Philemon had a large enough house that the  
assembly met in his house for church services.)**

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

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***The Spiritual Maturity of Philemon (verses 4-7)***

The spiritual status of the slave owner, Philemon. And the first thing we learn is that we should be in constant prayer for believers who are growing in the Word of God.

**Philemon 4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,** (Paul gives thanks for this slave owner, but because of his spiritual maturity and being used by God.)

**Philemon 5 because I hear of your love** (spiritual love by the filling of the Holy Spirit) **and of the faith** (here this refers to that which is believed or the doctrine in his soul) **which you have toward** (concerning) **the Lord Jesus and toward** (concerning) **all the saints;** (and now his slave, Onesimus is now a saint, still his slave but to be thought of as a fellow brother in Christ.)

Ok, this is important as to this letter: he commends Philemon for his doctrinal understanding of Jesus Christ and the place of every believer. In a moment he will inform Philemon that the slave Onesimus is now a believer in Jesus Christ.

**Philemon 6 and I pray that the fellowship** (the sharing) **of your faith** (knowledge of doctrine) **may become effective** (or promote) **the knowledge of every good thing which is in**

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**you** (this is plural; a preferred textual variant: us)  
**us for Christ's sake.** (Benefit, here)

Paul prays that the sharing of his knowledge of doctrine will be put to use promoting doctrine for the benefit of Jesus Christ. That is, that from Philemon's spiritual love and knowledge of biblical truth, Paul expects this to result in the benefit of the Lord and in the benefit of all saints, especially Onesimus, because he also is now a saint. Think about this for a long time. This is a powerful prayer! We should all imitate this prayer for one another, that all the Biblical things we are learning here may promote the learning of Jesus Christ.

**Philemon 7 For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love,** (spiritual love encourages others) **because the hearts of the saints** (namely in Colossae) **have been refreshed through you, brother.**

*Purpose of the letter (verses 8-12)*

**Philemon 8 Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ** (because of his position as Apostle and the authority that goes with that gift) **to order you to do what is proper,** (proper: according to who he is in Christ to treat his runaway slave Onesimus in a manner that is glorifying to Jesus Christ.)

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**Philemon 9 yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, (having the rank of apostle and having the wisdom of an older man) and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—**

As an apostle, Paul could have ordered Philemon to forgive and accept back Onesimus as his slave without penalty, but he prefers to leave this up to the free will decision of this wonderful believer Philemon.

**Philemon 10 I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, (Paul accomplished what Philemon could not and that was to bring the slave Onesimus to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.)**

**Philemon 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful (greatly useful in the Lord's work) both to you and to me.**

**Philemon 12 I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, (Paul now has spiritual love directed toward the slave Onesimus.)**

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*The spiritual value of the slave Onesimus (verses 13-15)*

**Philemon 13 whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;**

Often, we can give financial aid to those out serving the Lord, but sometimes there are other things we can send or do for them that will advance their spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Philemon 14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness** (his good character by doctrine in his soul and being led by the Holy Spirit) **would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.** (Sorry Calvinist but you missed one of the great blessings from God, free will of mankind.)

**15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever,**

*The crisis of Grace (verses 16-25)*

**Philemon 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to**

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**me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.**

Ok, why more so for Philemon than Paul? Here we learn something about giving! You give a hundred dollars, and of course that is beneficial to whomever you give it. But it is more beneficial to you! Both in time and at the judgment seat of Christ. The principle here is that, let's say you give \$100.00 to Spring Valley Bible Church. Ok, that goes into the needs of Spring Valley Bible Church. But, it is multiplied in your relationship with God and with Jesus Christ. No, this does not mean you will get back a \$1000.00 as some preachers like to proclaim. This is applied to you at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

**Philemon 17 If then you regard me a partner, (partner in Christ's work and you do) accept (or receive) him as *you would me.***

The slave Onesimus is returning to his master whom he has stolen money from and ran away, and he is carrying this letter from Paul. Please know that Philemon is free under Roman Law to do whatever he wishes with this runaway slave, even have him killed.

**Philemon 18 But if he has wronged you in any way (and he has) or owes you anything, (and he does) charge that to my account;**

**Philemon 19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, (this is important to me) I will repay it**

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(not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

Paul has led this slave owner, Philemon, to the Lord, just as he has led the slave Onesimus to the Lord. (I don't know about you, but I owe my mother, not for all the wonderful things she did and the sacrifices she made but for leading me to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.)

**20 Yes,** (please understand what I am saying to you about Onesimus,) **brother,** (Philemon) **let me benefit from you in the Lord;** (by forgiving Onesimus and sending him back to work with me, Paul) **refresh my heart in Christ.**

Don't speed read past this beautiful phrase: think about this. Do you 'refresh' others in Christ? This word means to give new strength or energy to someone, to reinvigorate them spiritually. This is what will happen to Paul if this slave, Onesimus comes back to work with him in spreading the good news of the gospel and the teaching of the Word of God.

**Philemon 21 Having confidence in your obedience,** (not to Paul but to the Lord) **I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.** (He might even set this believing slave free.)



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**Philemon 22 At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope (anticipate) that through your prayers I will be given to you.**

I will come to you at Colossae, in your home.

**Philemon 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,**

**Philemon 24 as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.**

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

And now back to Colossians 4:9.

**Colossians 4:9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.**

**and with him.** That is, traveling with the free gentile Tychicus on his way from Rome to Colossae.

**Onesimus.** Now notice how Paul refers to this slave: **our faithful and beloved brother.** Paul has led this slave to believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior and is sending him back to Philemon, his master. We noted how precious it is to be known as faithful in verse 7 where Paul used this same word to refer to a Gentile freeman, Tychicus. And here we have traveling from Rome to Colossae a Gentile freeman and a Gentile slave.

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And Paul not only refers to this slave as faithful but as a **beloved brother**.

This is not some sweetness and light! This adjective is from the root *agapao* – to love.

**“Beloved”**

- I. This adjective is used to refer to someone who is highly esteemed, or valued or desired.
- II. It is used only of Christians as united with God through Jesus Christ.
- III. It is used of Christians as they are united with one another. We should consider every believer as ‘beloved’. **Col. 1:7 ...our beloved fellow bondservant.**
- IV. This adjective, “beloved,” is used to show every believer how he/she is related to God. **Rom. 1:7 beloved of God; 1 John 3:2 beloved, now we are children of God.** Now, after faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, children of God, we must all come to him as a child with child-like faith.
- V. Every pastor should regard everyone who consistently comes to hear his teaching as ‘beloved.’ **1 Pet. 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers on earth to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.**
- VI. When accompanied with the word “son” it refers to the one and only Son of God the Father: Jesus the Christ. In the New

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Testament, used only in reference to Jesus as the Son, Beloved of God.

At His baptism:

**Luke 3:22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.”**

Why is the Father ‘well pleased’ with His Son?

**Isaiah 42:1 “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;  
My chosen one in whom My soul delights.  
I have put My Spirit upon Him;  
He will bring forth justice to the nations.**

Note, while we know that it was out of His love for ‘the nations’ that He sent His beloved son, His son came to satisfy His Justice, His perfect Righteousness. God sent His love to solve His Righteousness.

So, I hope you can see that this is a valued adjective used to describe why everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior is precious and when you are depressed with life, just remember you are beloved before God.

Back to Colossians 4:9.

**and with him.** with Tychicus

**Onesimus.** So, here is a free gentile believer traveling with a slave gentile believer; who Paul now describes as

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**our faithful and beloved brother.** We are all related to each other by our being ‘in Christ’ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the point of faith in Jesus Christ.

**Who.** Referring to Onesimus.

**Is.** And the *present active indicative* is very important here because Paul is using it now in the description, not of being a slave from Colossae, but it is used here to introduce him as one who has believed in Jesus Christ. This slave has most likely caused a great deal of trouble in this assembly, being that he was a disobedient slave of the man in whose house they assembled for worship. Knowing people, there were probably some who wanted to move out of his house for assembly. While others wanted him to kill this runaway slave, while others probably wanted him to just forget him and move on. It is so interesting how believers cannot keep their ‘nose’ out of other believers business.

**Who is one of your number** (one of you). That is, he is from that very house where they met.

**They both.** The teacher Tychicus and the slave.

**will inform you about the whole situation here.** How about that? They are now not only to accept him as a fellow member of the beloved but they are to ‘listen’ to him when he tells them about Paul. Most likely he told them how Paul led him to believe in Jesus Christ.

**they will inform you.** Make something known to you that you desire to know and will be benefited by knowing these things. This is a *dative of advantage*. It will be to their spiritual advantage to know the things Tychicus and Onesimus will tell them.

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Now Paul names other believers who are part of his reaching the world with the gospel.

There are lists of people who are distinguished by something they did or something they endured:

Linda June Sheehan; John Irgang; Lisa L. Young; just 3 of the some thousands who died on 9/11 in New York.

Chief William McGovern, Lt. Thomas O'Hagan; just 2 of First Responders who died on 9/11.

Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah----Generations from Adam to the flood.

Shem, Ham, Japheth – sons born to Noah after the Flood.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob ....Jesse –father of David, Solomon – Jewish line of Jesus the Christ.

Abraham, Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Heber, Shelah, Cainan, Arphaxad, Shem, Noah, Lamech, Methuselah, Enoch, Jared, Mahalaleel, Dainan, Enosh, Seth, Adam Genealogy of Jesus – Gentile line from Adam.

Point: There are a multitude of lists of names in the Bible and we can learn so much from every one of these list.

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Will your name be on the list of faithful servants of Church Age?

Here in the closing of Colossians, we have a short list of great heroes of our Christian heritage. Few Christians are familiar with most of these people but these are the truly great ones, these are the ones upon whom the Church was built.

**Colossians 4:10 Aristarchus, my fellow  
prisoner, sends you his greetings;**

**Aristarchus.** A Jew with a famous Greek name. The Greek name means best ruler. He is from Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia to which Paul wrote two letters. He was a companion of Paul on his third missionary journey. We can follow this Aristarchus through the book of Acts. In Acts 19:29, spring of 56 A.D., Aristarchus was seized and nearly killed by a mob in Ephesus because of his association with Paul. He survived because God had a plan for his life that went beyond Ephesus.

This presents us with a very important principle: God has a plan for your life---everyone of you! Unfortunately, not every believer gets with God's plan for his/her life. They setup other priorities that counter and interfere with God's plan for their lives. Not necessarily sinful things, but things that counter God's plan. For example, some believers marry the wrong person and that sets the course of their lives. Others pursue financial gain. Even the desire for a geographical area can interfere with God's plan. But most of all, making the decision that His Word is not priority in your life, that increasing in the knowledge of God and growing in the knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ is not a priority in their lives. These believers are satisfied with just a nice life. Oh, they may go to church on

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most Sundays and in their minds that is all they need. People, there is no reincarnation, you have one chance, one opportunity to glorify Christ, one life. So please remember: ‘only one life, twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.’ You may survive some very devastating things for this very reason, that God has something more for you. Being attacked by a bear, a critical wreck, death of someone, some critical illness etc. But you are still here, you are still alive, God has a plan for you! It may not be what you planned, seldom is it, but it is plan where you glorify the Son of God. But God’s plan for your life calls for few things: first being faithful: Faithful in walking by the Holy Spirit by faith; faithful in the growth; faithful in spiritual love toward everyone; being consistent and persistent in the intake of the Word of God; being faithful even when you do not understand.

Then in 57 A.D., he accompanies Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). He probably was carrying the collection from Thessalonica to help the Christians in Jerusalem.

In 59 A.D., he accompanies Paul on the ship from Caesarea. (Acts 27:2) Now, here is one of those decisions that we might face in life. He had the opportunity of breaking off with Paul (after the riot in Ephesus) when the great shipwreck voyage began, but he made the decision to continue to travel with Paul. He had a great ministry of refreshment and encouragement to Paul and others.

In 60 A.D., Aristarchus is now in prison with Paul (Col. 4:10). He was as much an encouragement to Paul as Paul was to him. Ever think about this? That you are here to encourage others in their Christian lives. We

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have a large number of young people going to college, some for the first time. A note from you would be such encouragement to them.

Apparently, Aristarchus, like Paul, was martyred in Rome during Nero's administration.

Let's see what we can learn from a believer like Aristarchus, who was one of the foundations of the Church.

***Aristarchus:***

1. He was what may be considered a 'strong' believer. He was faithful to the Lord and therefore a faithful friend of Paul's.
2. He is characterized as one who loves the teaching of the Word of God and therefore stayed with Paul as often as he could even in difficult times.
3. He trusted the Lord even when his life was in danger as in the mob attack in Ephesus and in prison in Rome.
4. He is a perfect example of one who has 'put on' the whole armor of God that he might be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil, as per Ephesians 6; and remained 'strong' in the Lord, in the strength of His might as per Ephesians 6:10. Once we have completed our study of Colossians, we will study the book of Ephesians that we all may be spiritual warriors like Aristarchus. The time may be that you will have to be 'strong' Christians in America, standing firm against the schemes of Satan.
5. Aristarchus was also a prayer warrior, who prayed in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit as per Ephesians 6:18.



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6. He was controlled by spiritual love. He could easily travel with the slave Onesimus and be trusted to teach those in Colossae once he arrived there. He was able to be a blessing to others. His love of Jesus Christ encouraged others to love Jesus Christ. His love of the Word of God encouraged others to love the Word of God. His spiritual love encouraged others to love one another as Christ loves.
7. His Spiritual maturity enabled him to restore weaker believers as per Galatians 6:1-2. Instead of judging so as to keep a sinful believer down, he judged so as to lift them up in their own spiritual journey.
8. And very important to Christians in America today, he had the Biblical knowledge and spiritual fortitude not to be influenced by evil trends and the philosophy of man (Col. 2:4; 7-8).
9. Finally, the strong believers like Aristarchus have maximum effectiveness in the angelic conflict of their day.

I hope that everyone here at Spring Valley Bible Church desires to be like Aristarchus:

**faithful believer,**

**faithful to the Lord,**

**faithful in growing in His Word,**

**faithful to others,**

**Not noticed by the world but receive special notice from the head of the Church, our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.**