

Philemon Introduction

01/26/20

Appeal, Sovereignty, Substitute

Open your Bibles to the book of Philemon

¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

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

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I want 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 say. ²² At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

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

²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. ¹

As I said last week, this really is a beautiful letter..... it full of emotion, affection, love admiration..... and along with that, there is a request being made that is very serious and will have a tremendous effect on all parties involved.....

last week, we noted.....There is nothing easy about what Paul is encouraging Onesimus to do, go back to his master.....Nor, quite honestly, is there anything easy about what Paul is encouraging Philemon to do, forgive his slave who is now a brother in Christ..... Onesimus who when he arrived in Rome, after fleeing the house of Philemon, surely felt that he found the freedom he was looking for..... Rome was 1300 miles from Colossae.....a 60 day journey..... a city of nearly 1,000,000.....and there would be virtually no way anyone would ever find him, hunt for him or take him back to his master Philemon.....He is a runaway slave, and he made it to his destination..... he feels safe!

Surely, he felt more free than he had ever been, no more master..... he is now in control of his own destiny..... he has a new life, a new desire.....and he is loving his new found freedom..... until he heard Paul preach..... Paul was under house arrest in Rome, and we saw last week, that though a prisoner, he had the freedom to preach and teach anyone who would come and listen..... and Acts 28 tells us that he expounded the Scriptures daily....., testifying about the Kingdom of God and he did all he could to convince those who would listen that Jesus was the Christ.....

and apparently, Onesimus was one of those who was convinced..... convinced that He was a sinner..... convinced that He needed a Saviour.....convinced that Christ was the only One who could deliver Him from the weight of guilt, sin, despair..... so he repented of His sin....put His faith in Christ substitutionary death, and He was a new creature in Christ.

Now, we do not know how the conversation ensued, but at some point, Paul became aware Onesimus was a run away slave.... and during the conversation, Paul also discovered that Onesimus had run away from someone He knew..... He had run from Paul's good friend Philemon. And, Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon who is a believer and who Paul has the opportunity to appeal to on Onesimus' behalf.....

Paul's desire is that Philemon will accept and forgive him and not harm him. As I said last week, Roman slavery was different than slavery in the United States, in that it was not racial.....Most Roman slaves were prisoners from nations the Romans had conquered..... they did not highlight one race or ethnic group to be slaves..... but, listen carefully..... it was just as cruel; slaves were property, just like sheep, goats, and cattle and a returned run away would normally be branded with an large FUG on his forehead, and could possibly face the harshest of physical punishment.... which was perfectly legal under Roman law.....

And, the point we made last week was that New Life in Christ brings new challenges..... When you trust Christ to save you, and you are living with a girl you are not married to, you will give up your immorality to follow Christ.....like Zacheaus the tax collector, you will go back to some of those who you knowingly offended, knowingly sinned against, knowingly swindled, and ask for forgiveness and make restitution when possible.....

Asking for forgiveness and making restitution does not save you, but when you are saved, the Spirit of God who now resides in you, moves you to these acts of restoration.... And Onesimus, as a new Christian followed Paul's counsel to go back to his master, submit to him, and trust God to work out the details and the possible consequences....

What I want to do today, as we wrap up this short letter is notice just 3 things..... First, we will examine some specific things about Paul's appeal, 2nd, I want to show you the picture of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice in the letter.....then third, we will notice some things from church history that show us as Paul Harvey would say, "The rest of the Story."

Notice first, Paul's appeal to how well Philemon cares for those who are believers.... I mentioned this last week, but I did not apply it to where I am going today..... In verse 5 and verse 7, Paul describes Philemon as one who loves the saints and refreshes the souls of the saints..... a saint is not a person from the past who lived a great life who was given the title "saint" by an ecclesiastical body.....like St. Patrick or St. Christopher or St. Joseph.

The word saint means holy one one belonging to God.... And of course our holiness is not from ourselves, we have an imputed holiness when we put our faith and trust in Christ.....A saint is any true Christian believer..... so Philemon had a habit of serving, refreshing, and ministering to Christians....

We also know from verse 2 that the church meets in his house, and this church no doubt is the Colossian church.....

So, Paul is bringing the news about Onesimus's salvation to Philemon in a way that puts Onesimus in the same category as any other saint, any one who attends the church in Philemon's house or any other believer in Christ.....and Paul would expect him to treat him as he has been treating other Christians....

Paul's view of salvation was that when a person came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all divisions, all separations, all factions were obliterated..... According to Ephesians 2, the barrier, the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile was gone.....Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, though separated by race and custom were one in Christ....

Rich believers and poor believers were united in Christ..... educated and non educated, one in Christ..... West Coast, big city, Californians, and small town, farm community Michiganders, one in Christ.....

In Galatians 3 verse 28, Paul wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."² Which means, as we apply this to Philemon and Onesimus that because of Christ a slave can have godly Christian fellowship with a person who owned slaves.....

It meant that in the church, a slave could be an elder, a deacon, a pastor..... in a church where his master attends..... this is unheard of in the secular culture, but the unity we have in Christ transcends our position in society.....it allows us to forgive one another.....this is what Paul is trying to get across to Philemon..... He just saying, "Philemon, Onesimus is a Christian believer, so treat him the way you treat other Christian believers."

He actually goes even further than that in verse 17, when he says, "Receive him as you would receive me." I am sure that when Paul stayed with Philemon, Philemon gave Paul the best room, the best food, the most tender care....

When I was in Kenya a few years ago, we stayed with a pastor and his wife, and they fed us like kings..... we were their guests, and we knew that they had spent an awful lot of money to feed us and treat us as royal guests.....we had just come from being out in the villages in Ethiopia and most of our clothes were filthy, and they took all of them and laundered them....

Did I say laundered....well, there was no washing machine in the house.... I was humbled as I heard the scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing our my socks, pants and shirts in the bathroom tub that was used since they had no washing machine....

Paul is saying, "Philemon, give Onesimus the royal treatment..... the way you treat me.... He is a believer.... He is a saint... he is a brother in Christ....."

Once that is established, Paul brings to light Onesimus' new usefulness.....notice verse 11,

"Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me."

If we could read Greek, we would notice Paul is using a play on words in this verse..... The name Onesimus means profitable.....or useful.....In verse 11, Paul is saying that prior to his conversion, he was useless, he was not useful.... he was not living up to his name.....and now that He is in Christ, He is useful because because of his new found faith..... he is useful or profitable to both Philemon and to Paul.... He is now living up to his name.... He truly is "Onesimus."

2 [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ga 3:28). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

There is something in this verse that more than implies that prior to salvation all of us, all we did, all we attempted to do..... all of our lives were useless.....we were dead in our trespasses and sin..... enemies of god..... lovers of self..... carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.³ remember in Philippians 3 Paul counted everything in his unconverted religious life as rubbish or dung..... he referred to everything in his preconverted life as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus His Lord. ⁴

Beloved our lives..... all lives are useless apart from Christ.....we are only useful when we are restored to the God who created us.....living for Him, loving Him, honoring Him.....Prior to Onesimus being born again, he was an unhappy, disgruntled, slave, longing for and looking to make a run for it as soon as he was able..... and, now, as Paul sends him back, there is no guarantee that he won't still be a slave..... but he is now a bond slave of Christ.....and in whatever he does, he will do for the glory of God..... he will have a new perspective, a new attitude, new desires, and a new disposition.....and even a new master, the Lord Jesus Christ....he is now useful....

Question #1 in the New City Catechism is: What is our only hope in life and death? The answer, "That we are not our own, but belong body and soul, both in life and death to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ." Our belonging to Him is what makes us useful.....Only in Christ is there true life, abundant life.....He is the bread of life.....He who has the Son has life... he who does not have the son shall not see life, but the wrath of god abideth on him.....

There are only two options..... .life in Christ..... or God's wrath without Christ..... and a life without Christ, regardless of whatever human accomplishments man may achieve in his short 70 or 80 years..... an entire life lived separated from the God who created you is a wasted life....only in Him is there genuine usefulness.....

Remember your life before you were converted?

Going about, looking for fulfillment, longing for some sort of satisfaction..... desiring some sort of usefulness, but always coming up short.....literally, we were groping about in darkness, sin, and despair..... as the hymn states, "The joys of earth have left my soul unsatisfied....." and this is the case for all mankind until we are reconciled to the god who created us.....Genuine usefulness is found in Jesus Christ.....

Do you know this usefulness? Are you a believing Christian? Or are you still searching, still groping, still looking for fulfillment and satisfaction in this life that only comes from Christ?

3 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Eph 2:3). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

4 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Php 3:8). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

The reason he will now be useful to Philemon, when he was not useful before was simply because Paul was sending him back... and through verse 14, he explains why he will send him back and why he has a new found usefulness.....Onesimus had been serving Paul after he was converted.....and, in a sense, Paul could have just let things be the way they are, and just assume that Onesimus was serving him on Philemon's behalf.....

It would be like having a friend that is out of the country, and he left his car and car keys at your house, but never gave you **formal** permission to use it.....and another friend of yours who is home on the mission field really needs a car for a month.....You know your friend out of the country well enough to know that you think it will be okay, but you haven't asked, so you don't want to presume....

Verse 14, Paul states, " but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ⁵" Paul is saying, "I want you to do this because you want to..... not because I am commanding to..... not because you are compelled because of external pressure but because of an internal heart attitude because you know it is right....."

Paul, then makes a powerful appeal in verse 15, " For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ⁶

What is he appealing to? God's sovereignty over the affairs of man..... listen, there was a church in the house of Philemon..... there is no doubt that Onesimus and all the slaves knew of the church, and at some level either attended, participated, or served in the church, and it is not a stretch to the text to believe that there is a great likelihood that Onesimus had heard the gospel.....but for whatever reason, he had not been convinced of his sin and his need for a Saviour.....And Paul's appeal to God's sovereignty is something that will be irrefutable to Philemon and to the entire church body..... and a tremendous encouragement to you and I.....

but notice first, he did not start with Sovereignty..... he did not mention this until after he begins his appeal..... until after he talks about the practical matters of his old age and of uselessness and usefulness..... after he talks about not desiring Philemon to do anything out of compulsion....

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 15–16). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

He does not use this wonderful doctrine as a hammer to just make Philemon line up with what God is doing.....and he does not overly push it..... sovereignty is a tough doctrine to grapple with because God turns our world upside down from time to time and we have no control over it.....

so we need to be careful of tossing it out flippantly when our dear brothers and sisters in Christ are facing great difficulty..... Sovereignty is the only thing that gets us through the hard times..... but Sovereignty is also the reason we have those hard times, and if we are honest, we do wrestle with it.....

Even in mentioning it, Paul uses the word "perhaps" in verse 15.... Perhaps is a thinking word..... it is a word that causes meditation... Paul is trying to get Philemon to think this through....."Philemon, have you considered that Perhaps God sent him all the way to Rome for the sole reason that he might come to faith in Christ?"

What a statement about God calling and drawing people to Himself..... and using questionable means in order to carry out his good purposes..... Onesimus broke the law by running away from his owner, Philemon..... Onesimus further complicated matters by stealing from Philemon..... However, God in his infinite mercy, all powerful sovereignty, his planned providence, puts Onesimus with a prepared heart in front of Paul when Paul brings the good News of Christ to bear upon his guilty soul..... and it is a reminder that God's plans and purposes are never thwarted..... like Joseph's brothers who threw Joseph into a cistern, then sold them to the Midianites, who then sold him to Potiphar, what they meant for evil God meant for good....

And here, even in the evil system of slavery..... even as a run away slave..... and even though he stole from his owner..... God had him leave Philemon's home for a while for the purpose of hearing about Christ, being convicted of His sin, repenting of his sin, and putting his faith and trust in Christ to save him from his sin..... so now according to verse 16,

no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ⁷

Oh, Philemon, do you see how useful he is now? serving the Lord, serving you, not as a slave, but as a brother.....do you see how God had his hand on Him, even as a runaway, even as a thief? That he directed his steps right to me, so that he might hear and believe.....Philemon this is far bigger than him just running from you..... his run from you was really part of God's eternal plan to draw him to himself..... and now he is a brother.....can you and will you accept him as such? will you forgive him?

⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 16). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

What an encouragement to those of us who have wayward children..... and grand children.... and other friends and or family members...who think they are running to freedom.... escaping all responsibilities..... running, running, running..... and God is chasing, chasing, chasing.... beloved, we do not know all of what is going on in the heavenlies..... behind the scenes..... if God would ever give us a peek of what was taking place behind the curtain of his providence and the working out of His sovereignty; we would find that he never stops working, as he fulfills His good purposes.....

he is not willing that any would perish but that all would come to repentance.....and even when we see our friends and loved ones participate in all manner of evil, there are times when God uses the evil to His own glory..... and it is the very thing that causes some to bow before his holiness in repentance and faith..... God does not author the evil... he does not cause the evil..... but he uses the evil for His good purposes.....Our wayward loved ones cannot out run God..... so keep praying.....

So, Onesimus is Paul's child..... he is useful..... he has been transformed by Christ, and he is encouraging Philemon to view the big picture..... in the grand scheme of things Philemon, though he sinned against you, this isn't about you.... it is about salvation.....and this is what it took for your hard hearted rebellious slave Onesimus to finally come to faith.....

so, now comes the real appeal in verses 17 and 18

So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. I already touched on this.....but....

This partnership he is talking about is a partnership of faith.....If you consider me a full partner in Christ with you..... if you consider you and I to be in complete harmony..... Paul has already referred to him as a beloved fellow worker..... and a brother..... so , now Paul is saying, "if you look at me as a full partner in the gospel..... I want you to receive or treat Philemon the same way you would receive or treat me....."

Are you kidding? he is slave, Paul..... treat him the way I would treat you? receive him the way I receive you? Paul, he is a runaway slave..... Paul he stole from me.....Paul, I had to buy a new slave to replace him so he is still costing me money..... What will the other slaves think if I treat a runaway this way?

Philemon, did you not hear what I said? He is in Christ..... He is your brother..... He has been redeemed..... And as far as what you lost.....verse 18 states, "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it⁸"

⁸ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 18–19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

I will make good all of his past debts..... whatever he owes you, I will cover.....

I can almost hear Philemon here either thinking out loud or saying..... "Really Paul? You don't have anything to repay me..... I support you.....Our church gives to you..... You need money from us o live, , and you are saying that you are going to pay His debt?"

And the, Paul goes on to remind him of just one small thing in verse 19

I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ⁹

Philemon, I may not have any cash..... but you owe me your very life..... your soul.....don't you remember that you, too are my child in the faith? I gave you the good news about Christ and you, too, like Onesimus were convinced of your sin and rescued from your sin and sealed in Christ for all of eternity.....you owe me your eternal soul..... and I did not charge you anything for offering you eternal life.....today, I am cashing in my chips.....

He is a brother..... receive him..... refresh his soul..... .encourage all those who worship with you in this house..... and forgive him as you have been forgiven.....Receive him the same way you would receive me.....

Finally, the one thing that we cannot miss from this passage of Scripture is from beginning to end it shows the story of sin and reconciliation through a substitutionary atonement.....and it is a reality when Onesimus trust Christ through the preaching of Paul.....,but, it is also shown as a type or picture when Paul assumes his debt..... In the apostle Paul we see a small glimpse of the picture of salvation..... and we understand this from verse 18, "If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁰"

So often we look to the Old Testament to see pictures and types of Christ..... or of things that take place that point to Christ the Messiah or salvation.....

We know that when God told Abraham to sacrifice his one and only son that the Ram caught in the thicket was the substitutionary sacrifice for Isaac,..... we know that Boaz redeeming Ruth was a picture of the redemption we have in Christ.....and if we took a long stroll through the Old Testament, we would see Christ in Moses, David, Jacob, Judah, Joseph and in many other places and events.....

however, we don't think of types in the New Testament as often as we do the Old..... When you step back far enough from the book of Philemon, and view it at 30,000 feet, you can't

⁹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 19). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

escape the fact that Onesimus owed Philemon a debt he could not pay, and Paul literally steps in as both an advocate and a substitute to pay the debt that Onesimus is incapable of payingone commentary explains it this way.

This generous act compares in a small way with Christ's substitutionary work on the cross. As Onesimus was in debt to Philemon, so sinners are in debt; they must pay for their sins against God. As Paul was not involved in any way with Onesimus' guilt, so Christ was sinless, separate from sinners (Heb. 4:15; 7:25). And as Paul assumed Onesimus' debt, so Christ assumes ours as well..... (Isa. 53:6; John 1:29; Heb. 7:27; 9:26, 28).¹¹

He who knew no sin became sin for us that in him, we might become the righteousness of god.....Paul did not sin against Philemon, but Onesimus did..... and Paul was willing to take the sin/debt of Onesimus so that Onesimus could be reconciled to his master.....Philemon's rightful wrath would have been against this runaway slave..... Onesimus did not merit forgiveness..... he was guilty and under just condemnation.

Those of you who have trusted Christ atoning death to save you have had your sin debt charged to Christ's account..... much like Onesimus had his personal, financial debt charged to Paul's account..... Of course the illustration cannot go much further than Paul stepping in for Philemon..... because Paul would never have the resources to pay the debt of more than a few slaves..... yet Christ has unlimited resources.....to save all who call upon Him.... there is more grace in Jesus than sin in us.....

And more than anything else in this short letter, Paul is showing us and the millions and millions of individuals throughout history who have read it, and heard it preached..... Paul is saying that for true reconciliation to a Holy God.....one needs a substitute.....one to stand in your place.....

all of us are Onesimus..... slaves..... slaves of sin..... looking for freedom..... willing to run, hide, escape..... so no one will find us..... trying this, experiencing that, coming short..... money does not satisfy, pleasure does not satisfy, fame, power, prestige, family, education, status.....nothing satisfies.....

neither does moralism, and trying to be good, or trying to be religious..... no matter what we try, our separation from God puts us in a state of total agreement with the Rolling Stones when they sing, "I can't get no satisfaction....." and the chorus goes on, "and I try, and I try, and I try and I try....

11 Deibler, E. C. (1985). Philemon. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 774). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Now, he finds it in Christ, when he hears Paul preach..... Christ is the substitutionary atonement for His sin, and he is reconciled to God.....and he is no longer running and no longer searching for freedom..... He is free in Christ because he has been redeemed. his sin has been paid for.....He does not deserve it..... he did not merit it..... he did not earn it..... We know that this transaction took place because he came back, no longer a slave, but more than a slave a beloved brother.....

and if you ever wonder what that looks like..... what substitution looks like..... then you hear Paul again..... " If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

¹²

Isn't this what Jesus in a sense is saying to the Father about you? You have a debt you cannot pay..... and the Lord Jesus, the righteous one, the Holy One, is telling the Father, "Rick Tarter has cried out for mercy, he owes you a debt he cannot pay.....charge his sin to my account....." I wonder this morning if you are still running? I wonder if you have been reconciled to God? Have your sins been paid for? Are you washed? as the old hymn states, are you washed in the blood of the lamb? Have you been born again? have you repented of your sin and put your faith in trust in Christ to save you from sin, death, and God's wrath that is against you?

What an amazing story.... reconciliation between God and man..... reconciliation between man and man.....what an amazing god.....

Do you think he did it? do you think he forgave him?

Paul's last line in the letter speaks of the tremendous difficulty we have in forgiving, doesn't it?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.¹³

To truly forgive, we need Grace.....we need the grace of the Lord Jesus.....

Grace - Xaris by definition is "A benefit arising purely from the goodness of the benefactor that inspires gratitude on the part of the one who receives it."¹⁴

God is the benefactor, Philemon is the recipient of His grace, and it inspires gratitude on his part..... such gratitude that he wants give the benefit he receives to someone who needs it..... that is grace.....

12 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

13 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Phm 25). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

14 Spicq, C., & Ernest, J. D. (1994). *Theological lexicon of the New Testament* (Vol. 3, pp. 503–504). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

"Philemon, I am praying that God would give you the grace to do the right thing..... you will need it because in and of yourself, you will want to punish, you will want to make him an object lesson..... in and of yourself, you will want to hurt and harm him because he is your property and he stole from you..... Your friends around you who have slaves will not understand why you are doing this..... you will worry that other slaves will take advantage of you.....but may the grace, the unmerited favor you have received from God so fill you that it spills over in your response to Onesimus."

and after all the appeal, after this being read before his family, the church, and even his friends knowing all about it and even Paul saying, I am going to come and check on you..... Forgiveness is supernatural..... and he needs God to intervene remind him of the grace he has experienced in Christ..... so that he can be a channel or a dispenser of that same grace to Onesimus..... And sometimes we have to just cry out, "God, give me the grace to be gracious....."

So did he? I think history proves he did..... the story of Onesimus in the NT ends here..... but there is a quote in church history that seems to indicate that there is as Paul Harvey would say, "The rest of the story."

Apparently a well known Church father in around 110 A.D. by the name of Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus that praised "their wonderful bishop or pastor Onesimus." He actually used the name Onesimus 14 times in his letter, and some of his letter to the church at Ephesus echoes some of Paul's words in the book of Philemon.

In the letter Ignatius wrote, he used the phrase from the book of Philemon verse 11, "who was formerly useless, but now is useful." And, scholars feel that the 110 date would mean Onesimus was around 70 years old, a perfect age for a pastor, elder, or bishop..... So, in the minds of many there is little doubt that the forgiveness Philemon gave to Onesimus freed him to serve the Lord Jesus pursue the ministry, and eventually become the pastor of the church at Ephesus.....

Going even further, John MacArthur quotes F.F. Bruce when he states that History records that it is Onesimus who was instrumental in collecting and preserving letters written by Paul. That's a significant responsibility. Church scholars tell us there's good evidence that he, Onesimus, gathered the letters of Paul into one place, preserving and protecting them, and it is likely that Onesimus was part of the early discussions on what letters should be part of the New Testament canon.....which may be why this little one page personal letter made it to our Bibles.....The Spirit of God may have used Onesimus to lobby for this little book.....

History tells us he was martyred, during the reign of Emperor Trajan, and the reason they killed him was because he refused to deny Christ.

A run away slave..... thinking he is running to freedom, yet he is running to Christ..... a Slave owner, challenged to forgive..... and a God of mercy and grace who orchestrates the calling of Onesimus to himself, gives Philemon the grace to forgive, calls onesimus to the ministry, and he remains faithful even to his own death.....

I am certain that each of these individuals would gladly join us in this closing song, as they would proclaim with us, that because of Christ, It is well, it is well, with my soul.

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus give you the desire to live for Him, to restore any broken relationships with others, to forgive those who may have sinned against you, and to move you to be available to help others maintain unity in the body of Christ, to His praise and His glory!