

# Men in the Bible - Men Like You and Me

## Philemon in a nutshell

Philemon (the "Friendly") is the recipient of a letter Paul wrote. According to tradition, he was later bishop in the range of Colossae. Paul probably wrote him in the year 56 after Christ's birth from the prison in Ephesus, or alternatively later while being imprisoned in Rome. Onesimus (the "Useful", Paul intends a little pun in verse 11) is Philemon's runaway slave, who has met Paul by whom he was converted to Christianity. The approximately 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire formed the backbone of its economic power. Runaway slaves therefore were pursued as criminals and had to fear the death penalty.

## And this is what YOU do:



Read the bible text on page 2. Have a look at page 3 for "Something to Think about".



Share your inspirations.



Discuss your insights.

- What problem did Philemon face, and what problem did Onesimus face?
- Which approach to solve it each of the two pursued at first?
- What did become of it?
- How do such problems look today?
- Which approaches to solve them would be available today?
- What might become of it?



Prepare your presentation.

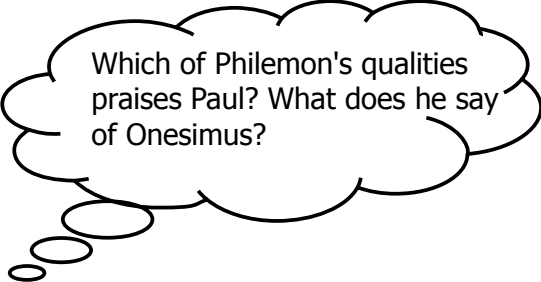
Sum up the results of your discussion in a 5-minute-presentation which can be performed as a role play, an interview, a short talk etc. Be creative!

😊 **Have fun!**

## **Philemon (Paul's Epistle to Philemon)**

4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your love for all his 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. 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 favour 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 for ever— 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.

## Something to Think About

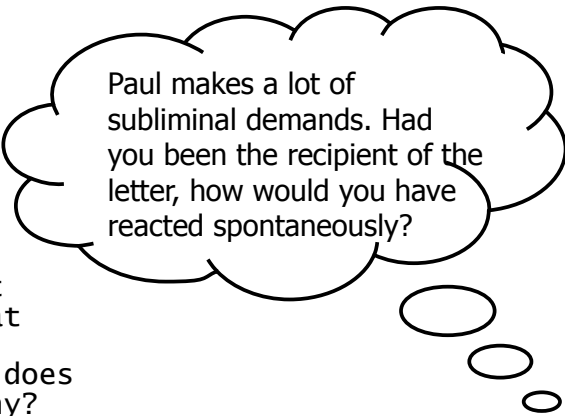


Which of Philemon's qualities praises Paul? What does he say of Onesimus?

What do you think does it feel like to possess a man? How might it have been in Philemon's time?

Onesimus committed a serious crime. Will he have ventured back to Philemon? How might his return have looked like? What might this have triggered for Philemon and his family?

Is Onesimus offense less serious because he now is a Christian?



Paul makes a lot of subliminal demands. Had you been the recipient of the letter, how would you have reacted spontaneously?

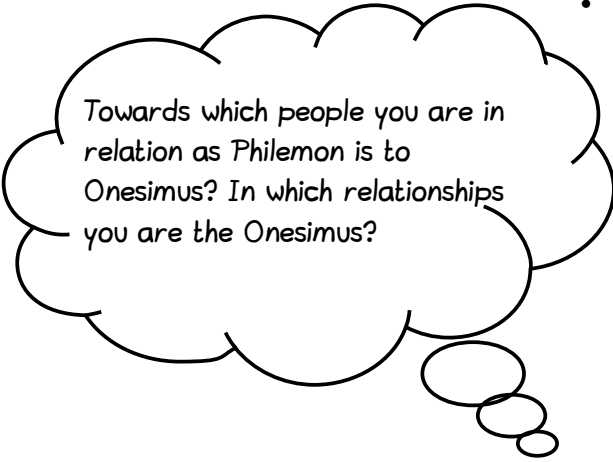
What does Paul want Philemon to do? What does he request directly, and what does he only hint at? Why?

How high do you reckon the chances that Philemon is doing what Paul asked of him?

What do you imagine did Paul tell Onesimus on how to behave?

How would you react in Onesimus's position if ...

- Philemon releases you?
- Philemon declines to release you, but offers you forgiveness?
- Philemon has you arrested and led to court?



Towards which people you are in relation as Philemon is to Onesimus? In which relationships you are the Onesimus?