

Philemon

Background

The letter is written to three fellow spiritual soldiers, Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, who collectively were elders of a single house Church. Apostle Paul mentions Archippus in his letter to the Colossian Church in the Southwest region of Asia (Colossians 4:17), which is likely where these three men have established their ministry.

Primary Teaching Theme: *Appeal for Forgiveness and Restoration*

The letter was written to make amends for the ineffective ministry of Onesimus or the errors he had made. Apostle Paul appeals for Onesimus to be given a second chance to prove himself, and the Apostle commits to absorbing the blame or debt for harm Onesimus caused in the past.

Apostolic Affirmation of Ministry Cp 1

The Apostle begins his address by affirming the ministry established by Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus. The Apostolic Affirmation provides a blueprint for determining how a ministry was identified as an authentic representative of the early Church and credible for teaching the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. (1:5-6)

Recognition of an Effective Ministry Cp 1

The ministry established by the three fellow spiritual soldiers of Apostle Paul proved to be effective. Their love for people and ministry greatly refreshed and restored the hearts and lives of people coming into the faith. (1:7)

The Appeal for Forgiveness Cp 1

The heart and center of the epistle was an appeal to forgive and restore Onesimus, a ministry son of Apostle Paul, who was sent to support the work of the three Church elders. The details of the fault or conflict within the ministry are not explicitly stated, but the appeal asking the Church leaders to forgive Onesimus is clearly expressed.

Intentionally omitting the details of the issue in writing highlights the importance for the Church to focus on its higher purpose in ministry. Forgiveness is the centerpiece of the gospel; without it, salvation is not possible. This epistle was written to emphasize the most important reaction and response required by the Church: *the ability to forgive*. (1:8-10)

The Apostle chose not to omit a description of the impact created by Onesimus' flawed ministry mission, citing that he was unprofitable (ineffective), and he abandoned the ministry with little or no notice. Reviewing how Onesimus negatively impacted the ministry revealed that the Apostle was not insensitive to the feelings of the Church leaders or the people they were required to spiritually cover and protect. (1:11-15)



The Appeal for Restoration Cp 1

A second chance appeal was presented by Apostle Paul, requesting that Onesimus return to the house Church and permanently remain with them to support the ministry. The Apostle vouches for his reliability and assures them that he would be profitable to the Church and add to their effectiveness in ministry.

Apostle Paul forced one condition upon the Church leaders to certify the restoration of Onesimus. He was not to be characterized as a servant but instead recognized in a status above. Apostle Paul wanted to ensure that Onesimus would not be unfairly limited in his ability to serve in ministry due to his past failure. He wanted Onesimus to be unencumbered from any conditions that might be placed upon him before allowing him to flourish in ministry.

Apostle Paul, his son in ministry, was to be received by the Church in the same manner as he would receive them. He asked the leaders to charge all wrongful misdeeds assigned to Onesimus to the Apostle's account instead. He would bear all responsibility for his past mistakes and take full accountability for asking them to forgive and restore him to ministry. (1:16-18)

