

The Book of Philemon – Part 2 – Summary & Study Guide

Summary

This teaching provides a detailed theological and practical study of the **Epistle to Philemon**, the shortest of the Apostle Paul's letters. The text explores the restoration of **Onesimus**, an escaped slave who converted to Christianity after encountering Paul in prison. Rather than exercising his apostolic authority to command obedience, Paul uses **gentle persuasion and appeals of love** to encourage Philemon to welcome his former servant back as a **beloved brother**. The commentary emphasizes that true Christian faith requires **active obedience**, particularly regarding the difficult duty of **forgiveness**. By referencing the **Parable of the Ten Virgins**, the speaker warns that spiritual preparation and a forgiving heart are essential for entry into the **Kingdom of God**. Ultimately, the sources frame the letter as a profound lesson on how **reconciliation** within the church must transcend social status and past grievances.

Study Guide

This study guide focuses on the second part of the study of Philemon, emphasizing the critical sequence of **preparation** and **obedience** that leads to true **forgiveness**. It draws heavily from Paul's letter and the teachings of Jesus to demonstrate that forgiveness is a divine command with eternal consequences.

Definitions of Key Words

- **Apostle:** A position of great authority called by God; Paul identifies as such but chooses to appeal to Philemon through love rather than raw command.
- **Day of Atonement (Metaphorical):** A perspective that "today" is the only guaranteed time for repentance and setting one's life right, as the future is not promised.
- **Fellowship (Koinonia):** A partnership in the faith that becomes effective through the knowledge of every good thing in Christ.
- **Heart:** Figuratively, the seat of the emotions and inward parts; the place where believers are "refreshed" by the love of others.
- **Onesimus:** Philemon's runaway slave whose name means "useful."

Through Paul, he became a "child in the faith" and was transformed from "useless" to "useful".

- **Prisoner of Christ Jesus:** Paul's description of his physical and spiritual state, which he uses to appeal to the "heartstrings" of his readers.
- **Saints:** The "holy ones" within the church community.
- **Slave (Historical Context):** In the first century, a "living tool" or "property." Paul challenges this social structure by returning Onesimus as a "beloved brother".
- **Sleep:** A biblical euphemism or metaphor for **death**.

Expansion of Key Points

1. The Urgency of Preparation

This teaching emphasizes that **preparation must happen in the "now"** because no one is guaranteed tomorrow. This is illustrated through the **Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)**.

- **The Ten Virgins:** All ten had the same motive—to meet the bridegroom—but only five were "prudent" (wise) while five were "foolish".
- **The Oil:** The foolish virgins made *some* preparation but it was **insufficient**; they lacked enough oil to sustain their lamps until the bridegroom's midnight arrival.
- **The Consequence:** Because they were underprepared, the door to the wedding feast was **shut**. Even when they called "Lord, Lord," the bridegroom replied, "I do not know you".

2. The Prerequisite of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is presented not as an option, but as a **commandment linked to our own salvation (Matthew 6:6-15)**.

- **The Lord's Prayer:** We are instructed to pray, "forgive us our debts, **as we also have forgiven our debtors**" (**Matthew 6:12**).
- **The Condition:** The teaching explicitly states that if we do not forgive others their transgressions, God will **not** forgive ours (**Matthew 6:14-15**).
- **Preparation for Forgiveness:** Forgiveness does not happen naturally; believers must **prepare their hearts** to forgive regardless of whether the other party apologizes or deserves it.

3. Paul's Strategy of Love and Appeal

Paul demonstrates how to motivate others toward obedience and forgiveness (**Philemon 1:4-14**).

- **Affirmation before Appeal:** Paul begins by praising Philemon's love and faith, noting how he has "refreshed the hearts of the saints" (**Philemon 1:4-7**).
- **Love vs. Authority:** Though Paul has the apostolic authority to **order** Philemon to do what is proper, he instead **appeals on the basis of love** (**Philemon 1:8-9**).
- **The Transformation of Onesimus:** Paul describes Onesimus as his "child" whom he "begot" in his imprisonment, signaling a deep spiritual bond (**Philemon 1:10**).

4. A New Relationship in Christ

The return of Onesimus represents a radical shift in social status (**Philemon 1:15-16**).

- **No Longer a Slave:** Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but... as a **beloved brother**" (**Philemon 1:16**).
- **Eternal Bond:** Paul suggests that the temporary separation of Onesimus from Philemon allowed for a reunion that would last **forever**, transcending the social structures of the age.

Study Questions

- What is the significance of the "midnight" arrival of the bridegroom in the Parable of the Ten Virgins?
- According to the source, why is it dangerous to rely on the "evangelical movement's" common teaching about Jesus "doing it all on the cross"?
- How does the source define the biblical meaning of "sleep" in contexts like **Daniel 12:2** and **John 11**?
- What are the "seven direct pronouns" in **Matthew 6:6** intended to show the believer?
- Why did Paul choose not to use his "apostle card" to order Philemon to forgive Onesimus?
- How does the source describe the status of a slave in the first-century Greco-Roman world, and how does this heighten the tension of the letter?

- What is the "rhetorical question" the source asks regarding those who refuse to forgive?

Answer Key

- **Midnight Arrival:** It represents an "inappropriate" or unexpected time, showing that Jesus will return when least expected, leaving no time for last-minute preparation.
- **The Danger of Modern Teaching:** It can "lull people into a lack of preparation" by suggesting they don't need to take action or obey commands like forgiveness to be saved.
- **Sleep:** It is a metaphor for being "stone dead," awaiting resurrection, rather than being alive in heaven.
- **Seven Direct Pronouns:** They show the Lord's intense, individual focus on the believer's personal prayer life and secret devotion.
- **Paul's Choice:** He wanted Philemon's "goodness" to be a result of **free will** and love rather than compulsion or a forced order.
- **Slave Status:** Slaves were "living tools" or "property." This makes Paul's request for Philemon to accept Onesimus as a "brother" incredibly radical and potentially life-endangering for Onesimus.
- **Rhetorical Question:** If a believer does not forgive, they will be held responsible for all their own transgressions and find themselves on the "wrong side of the door" of the wedding feast.

Complete List of Biblical References in the Source

- **Philemon 1:1-25** (General text and specific verses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22)
- **Matthew 25:1-13** (Parable of the Ten Virgins)
- **Matthew 25:31-33** (The Son of Man separating sheep and goats)
- **Matthew 6:6-15** (Prayer and Forgiveness)
- **Daniel 12:2** (Those who sleep in the dust)
- **John 11:11-14** (Lazarus sleeping/dead)
- **Colossians** (Referenced as a series)

Exhortations

- **Act in the "Now":** Do not procrastinate your spiritual life. If there is sin to shed or holiness to pursue, do it today, for today is the "day of atonement".
- **Make Proper Preparation:** Ensure your preparation for Christ's return is "sufficient." Do not be like the foolish virgins who had some oil but not enough to endure the wait.
- **Forgive Unconditionally:** Remove all conditions from your forgiveness. Do not wait for an apology or for the other person to forgive you first. Forgive because you are commanded to, and because your own forgiveness depends on it.
- **Embrace the Sequence:** Understand that spiritual maturity follows a sequence: **Preparation** leads to the strength for **Obedience**, which ultimately enables the difficult act of **Forgiveness**.
- **Model Paul's Love:** In your dealings with others, prefer the "appeal of love" over the "command of authority." Seek to refresh the hearts of those around you.