

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

Philemon

by Don Falkos

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Philemon was a wealthy man from Colossae, a small town several days' journey inland from Ephesus. Once while he was in Ephesus, Philemon met Paul, heard the good news, and believed. He became good friends with Paul and a partner in his ministry. After he returned to Colossae his home became the place for local believers to gather and worship the Lord.

While Paul was under arrest in Ephesus, he met another man from Colossae, a man named Onesimus. Onesimus also heard the good news and believed. He began looking after Paul and eventually became a partner in his ministry. But Onesimus was a run-away slave, and his owner was Paul's friend Philemon.

After Paul was set free, as much as he wanted to keep Onesimus with him, both men agreed the run-away must go back to his owner. Paul wrote an eloquent, persuasive letter to Philemon asking him to accept Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.

Paul reminded Philemon of their own close relationship as partners in the work of the Lord. When he finally mentioned Onesimus, he made it clear his relationship with the run-away slave was just as deep as his relationship with the slave's owner. "Onesimus, whose name means 'useful', was useless to you. But he has now become useful indeed to both of us. He is my child in the faith. I send my heart along with him. Welcome him as you would welcome me! If he owes you anything, I will pay you back. Far be it from me to mention you owe me your very soul. Look, I know you will do what I ask and perhaps even more."