

*From: Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ  
To: Philemon and the Church at Colossae  
Regarding: Onesimus*

# THE JOY OF FELLOWSHIP

**PHILEMON 1:4-7**

Special Music: "Joy" for KING & COUNTRY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IA7n7TwPDmw>

**Philemon 1:4-7**

**4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers,**

**5 because I hear about your love for all his holy 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.**

**HE JUST BEAT ME HOME**

I lost a good friend today,  
'Though he isn't really gone.  
I know in my heart of hearts  
He really just moved on.

We didn't talk that often.  
There wasn't much to tell.  
We just felt each other's presence.  
Because we knew each other well.

I will miss our conversations.  
Of which I was so fond.  
I will miss our times of laughter.  
That formed our common bond.

You see, he was my brother.  
Because my Lord enjoined  
Us in His salvation,  
And gave us both a home.

Someday beyond tomorrow  
When my work on earth is done,  
We'll talk and then we'll laugh.  
About how he beat me home.

**It's true that I will miss him.  
It's true that I will grieve.  
But He did not ask permission  
Before he took his leave**

**Time is built for mortals.  
And God knows our inner soul.  
And He sets aside a place for us,  
And a time for us to go.**

**A place where we can all rejoin  
Our loved ones and our friends,  
A place where pain does not exist,  
And joy will never end.**

**So yes, I lost a friend today,  
Yet, I know he isn't gone.  
You see, it's not a about the race.  
He just beat me home.**

Paul, a missionary to the Gentiles, was missing. Well, kind of. His followers knew he was in Rome, but no one could find him. And, in all honesty, it looked like most of his followers wanted to forget about him because they were ashamed to be followers of someone who was in prison. That's not the way we usually hear someone talking about Paul in prison. Let's face it, when people want to preach or talk about Paul in prison, they talk about how everyone was singing and praising God even though it was a hard time. But I guess everyone has their limit and Acts 22:22 – 29 tells us when Paul hits his frustration Point. Paul is telling a crowd in Jerusalem about Chris sending him to the Gentiles with the message of the Gospel:

**22 The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"**

**23 As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,**

**24 the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this.**

**25 As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"**

**26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”**

**27 The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”**

**“Yes, I am,” he answered.**

**28 Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.”**

**“But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.**

**29 Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.**

I have talked before about Roman citizenship and how there were several different ways of getting citizenship. You could earn it in battle, but this was probably the hardest way and least respected. The way the Romans saw it, you might have done a magnificent thing in battle, but you were still an illiterate mongrel. Then, like the commander above, you could save up your money and buy your citizenship which was a lot like buying a title. Those people that could come up with enough money to do that, were a little better than the soldier that earned his, but at least if you had some money you could learn to read and write. The highest respected citizenship was that by birth. Paul’s mother was Hebrew, but his father was a Roman citizen which automatically made Paul a Roman

**citizen. Every natural born Roman citizen was allowed to plead their case before the emperor. It was the law of the Empire.**

**This commander was in quite a dilemma. He really had no right to arrest Paul and yet, if he didn't do something the crowd was going kill Paul making everything worse. If his superiors had discovered that he had allowed a crowd to kill a born citizen Rome, he probably would have lost his life as well. If he didn't allow Paul to plead his case to the emperor, it could possibly cause an insurrection. He decided to put Paul under house arrest and shipped him off to Rome to plead his case, praying no one would question his involvement. He did this telling himself that it was for Paul's own safety.**

**The journey to Rome was filled with stories, danger, and peril. At one point, their boat sunk, and they found themselves stranded on a beach. It seemed doubtful that Paul would ever get to Rome. But God brought him and those with him out of every crisis and they finally landed just outside Rome. The trip and his imprisonment lasted three years. He was then released for a little while, about six months, and then incarcerated again until he is believed to have been beheaded. There are more questions than answers about this time in history because this was during the reign of Nero, when things were never what they seemed.**

**Up until his death, Paul did enjoy his fellowship with those church leaders that followed him. He was constantly writing letters to them, and they would write back. But they all had to be hand delivered, which was a slow process. It must have been a comfort when he received one of these letters or that there were**

people who would deliver letters back to the churches. We have grown up believing that Paul had a tremendous amount of help and support while he was in prison in Rome. But such was not the case.

Second Timothy is written from Paul's prison cell in Rome to his young apprentice who is in Ephesus. Let me read you a passage from 2 Timothy 1:15-18.

**15 You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.**

**16 May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain;**

**17 when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me**

**18 —may the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! And you know very well how much service he rendered in Ephesus..**

**“You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.”**

I can hear Jesus' voice speaking to Paul in his despair to remind him:

**“Listen! A sower went out to sow.**

**4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.**

**5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil.**

**6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.**

**7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.**

**8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.**

**9 Let anyone with ears listen!**

These were words spoken to Jesus' disciples, but Paul must have been saying them to himself knowing that he needed to remember the he wasn't alone in his struggles.

What we do know is that when Paul stepped of that boat near Rome, he became lost in a sea of red tape. He was in a jail cell somewhere among the hundreds of jails in that huge city that he was unfamiliar with, cut off from the fellowship of those who still supported him. Some began to search for him, but quickly turned back. Others searched a little longer but not very diligently because they were ashamed and did not want to be associated with a common criminal. Still others grew weary of the search and went back home. It is in this moment of Paul's despair as he realizes that it appears no one, not a single person is looking for him. All these people that he has helped and taught, have fallen away, hung him out to dry, left him for dead.

All except Onesiphorus.



Wait pastor, who is Onesiphorus? Paul didn't write him any letters that we know of. He doesn't seem to be a man of great character. He doesn't say anything profound. He's not out on the street feeding the widows and orphans. As a matter of fact, preacher, he is pretty much a nobody. We never read about him in Sunday School and I've never heard a sermon about it.

I, can't argue with you. Everything you say is true. It seems that Onesiphorus was either a slave or a servant of Philemon's, but no one is quite sure. Philemon was living and working with the church in Colossae at the time. So, did Philemon send Onesiphorus to find and help Paul? We don't know. Maybe he just followed Paul and was the only one who went the extra mile to find him. Was he afraid to go back to Philemon without having found him? Philemon was one of the remaining followers of Paul, doing his best to help. If Onesiphorus was sent to find Paul, why didn't he just make a run for it. No one would have cared, except maybe Paul. Who is Onesiphorus and why do we care? Why does Paul spend almost all of the letter to Philemon talking about Onesiphorus? One might think that the book should have been called Onesiphorus.

The character of Onesiphorus is rare in the Bible. It shows the blossoming of a Christian learning that service to God is service to humans. Through his time of service to Paul, he comes to a great understanding of his purpose. Paul serves as an example of grace and mercy as he allows Onesiphorus to minister to his needs with patience.

We tend to think of fellowship as something that involves more than two people. But that isn't necessarily so. It only takes two people to hone, sharpen, and restore each other. But without fellowship, without Christian interaction, we tend to fall into rust and decay, just like Paul rotting away in a Roman jail cell believing that no one would ever find him. Most of us believe that Paul was beyond such despair with all he had been through, but despair is one of the inherent issues with being human. None of us are exempt, finding ourselves without support can be damaging mentally, physically, and spiritually. It is vital for our own well-being that we take care of one another. Onesiphorus was a lifeline in a sea of despair for Paul, and Paul was so very grateful for his presence and diligence.

Since our passage today was written to Philemon at the church in Colossae, we can also see the wonderful fellowship that Paul and Philemon had. It is Paul that gives this letter to Onesiphorus and has him deliver it. It's an important letter and it outlines how responsible Onesiphorus has become. It also shows how much Paul trust him. But please note the love that Paul puts into the letter to Philemon and to the church in Colossae. Listen to verses 4 & 5.

**4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers,**

**5 because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus.**

There truly is no animosity here because, through Onesiphorus, Paul has learned that Philemon and his brethren really didn't forget about Paul. Onesiphorus' diligence proves that.

**As the relationship between Paul and Onesiphorus grew and they leaned into each other, don't you know that Onesiphorus grew as a person and a Christian. It is also true Paul found a special joy in fellowship that he thought he might never know again. Even though Paul believed that he had been deserted, Onesiphorus brought hope for Paul that he might return to fellowship with the Christian brethren around the Mediterranean.**

**The books of Jude and Philemon and are both 25 verses long. Short letters packed with powerful information. We will spend this month continuing to delve into the lessons from Philemon and how Onesiphorus plays a much larger part in understanding our role as Christians than we ever thought.**

**If you have not had the opportunity to read through the letter to Philemon, I would appreciate it if you would take the time to read it this week. It is important to know that if it were not for Onesiphorus, many of Paul's letters written from Rome would never have found their way to us today. So, we need to be grateful to him and the lessons that he can teach us.**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

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