



Forward thinking from Philemon ...

Regarded as a Partner

For an appeal to be effective and honest, the proper groundwork has to be laid. A simple, non-costly appeal does not require much groundwork because of its simplicity; asking a co-worker to reach and hand over a tool does not require much of a working relationship, and does not require much preparation before the request is made. But if the request is complicated, costly, time-consuming, or requiring the other person to step out of a comfort zone, then the proper points have to be put into place and enumerated before the appeal can legitimately be made. Paul, in preparation for making his plea to Philemon, had laid down the following points:

- Philemon was a beloved brother and fellow worker.
- Paul complimented Philemon on his reputation for loving the Lord Jesus, and for all the saints.
- Paul personally was comforted by Philemon's love, because the hearts of the saints had been refreshed by Philemon.
- Paul had dealt honorably with Onesimus, the runaway slave.
- Paul had "begotten" Onesimus while Paul was imprisoned, and had trained the slave in the ways of Christ.
- Paul's work had been effective, for Onesimus was truly a changed man and obedient Christian.
- When Onesimus was sufficiently on the right spiritual track, Paul sent him back to Philemon.

Paul then pointed out that Onesimus was not merely a returned slave, but a beloved brother in Christ to Philemon, and that the two would be in fellowship forever.

- **The appeal** — With these points in place and properly emphasized, the apostle is ready for his appeal: "If then you regard me as a partner," is the apostle's tendered offer, "accept him as you would me" (Philemon 1:17). That is quite an appeal! Philemon clearly respected Paul, and would have done much for him. Essentially Paul is asking that Philemon welcome Onesimus back much like the prodigal son.
- **Clearing away objections** — Part of any persuasion is clearing away objections the other party may have. The apostle anticipates that Onesimus' leaving Philemon might not have been pleasant, and that the slave in the process of running away may have inflicted damage of different kinds. So Paul says, "But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account" (Philemon 1:18). As Christ was willing to give us new beginning, so Paul is doing his part to give this brother a new beginning in going back to his life as a slave; any charges or damages were to be written on Paul's ledger. These are not mere words; the apostle says to his beloved brother in Christ, "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it!" (Philemon 1:19).
- **A little reminder** — One of the great principles of the scripture is that the sowing of spiritual seed is of much greater value than the seed of the ground. "If we sowed spiritual things in you," he queried the church in Corinth, "is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" (1 Corinthians 9:11). To make his next stage of appeal to Philemon, the apostle uses this principle in regard to possibility of Philemon's asking Paul to cover the expenses connected with the runaway Onesimus: "I will repay it (lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)." Philemon, if he processed correctly, would know the debt he owed to Paul for the salvation of his soul was so great that the drachmas-worth of damage caused by Onesimus was so small as not to be worthy of consideration.

As Paul closed off his importuning, he appealed, knowing the character of Philemon. "Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord," is his plea, regarding basically the cancellation of any physical debt connected with Onesimus, "refresh my heart in Christ" (Philemon 1:20). With everyone forgiven both physical and spiritual debt, there is a great lifting of burdens, a great refreshing!

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