

Philemon 1:20-21

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phlm/phlm-1/philemon-120-21/>

Paul sums up his requests and asks Philemon to refresh his heart. He expresses confidence that Philemon will do even more than what Paul asked of him.

Paul has made his appeals to Philemon for love's sake as a prisoner of the Lord (Philemon 1:9); he requests that Philemon allow Onesimus to return to Rome (Philemon 1:11-14), that he be set free (Philemon 1:15-16), and that his debts be forgiven (Philemon 1:17-19). Paul addresses Philemon with another familial recognition, calling him brother. Yes, *brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.*

This was Philemon's opportunity to do great good to Paul, Onesimus, the gospel, and himself. Paul told Philemon that if he mercifully pardoned Onesimus and granted Paul's appeals with kindness that it would *refresh my heart*. As a prisoner in Rome for the Lord, news of Philemon's mercy would have undoubtedly been a tremendous encouragement to Paul.

Paul added, *Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.* Paul hoped and trusted *that* Philemon would *do* the right thing and *even more than* was asked of him. He believed that Philemon would grant his appeals for Onesimus.

The Bible makes no further reference to how Philemon responded or what became of Onesimus.

Church tradition holds that Philemon did all that Paul asked of him and released his former slave, forgave his debts and offenses, and returned Onesimus to Rome as a beloved *brother in Christ*. The early church widely held that Onesimus became the church leader of Ephesus after Timothy. The early church father, Ignatius (died 108 A.D.) refers to a man named Onesimus throughout one of his epistles, as the bishop of Ephesus (Ignatius's Epistle to the Ephesians, 1:1, 1:2, 1:6). Tradition holds that this is the same Onesimus from the letter to Philemon. It is also understood that Onesimus was martyred by the persecution of the Roman Emperor Domitian (81 A.D. – 96 A.D.), or possibly under the Roman Emperor Trajan (98 A.D. – 117 A.D.). In this sense then, Paul's expectation would be more than fulfilled; Philemon did indeed do *even more* than what Paul asked. It seems likely that Philemon not only freed Onesimus, but also disciplined Onesimus, preparing him to become a great minister of Christ.

Biblical Text

20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.